Spring 2004

EDUCATION next

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

No Money Left Behind

The true costs of school accountability

ROBERT COSTRELL • JAMES PEYSER

IN THIS ISSUE:

Life on the School Board, Civic Education, Voucher Research, Teachers and Race, Tough vs. Easy Grading, Revisionist Social Studies, Charter School Finances

CONTRIBUTORS: JONATHAN BURACK, LARRY CUBAN, THOMAS DEE, DAVID FIGLIO, CHESTER FINN JR., WILLIAM HOWELL, STEPHEN MACEDO, PETER MEYER, PAUL PETERSON, KIM SMITH

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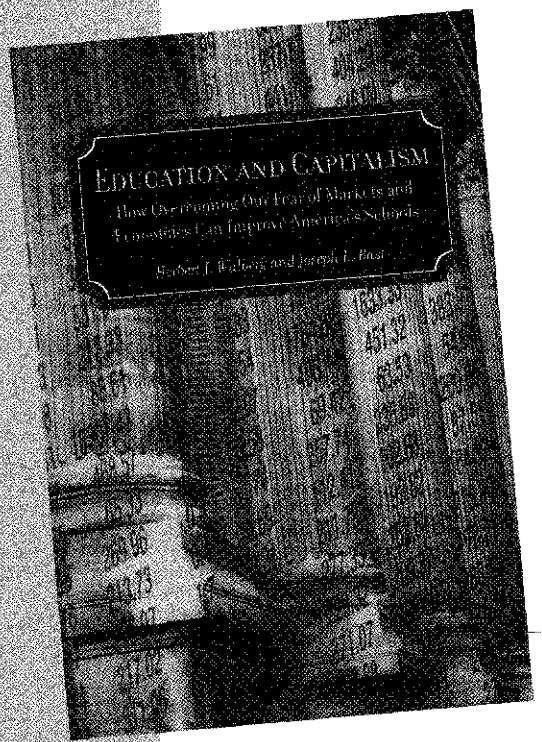

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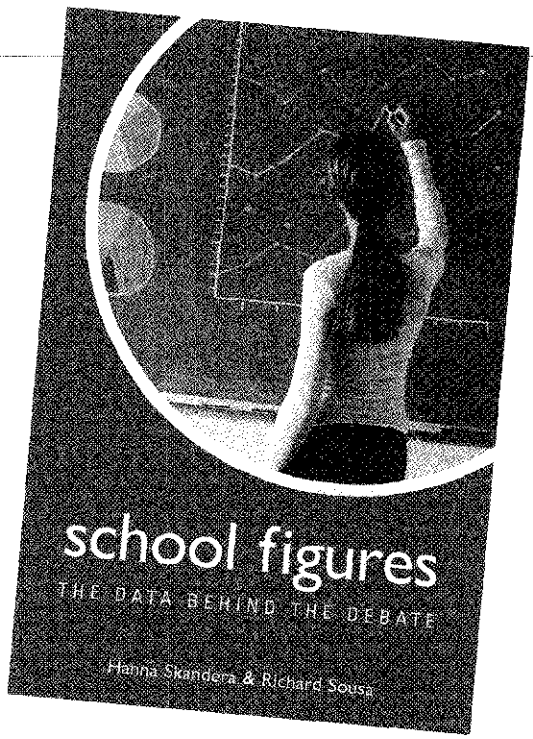

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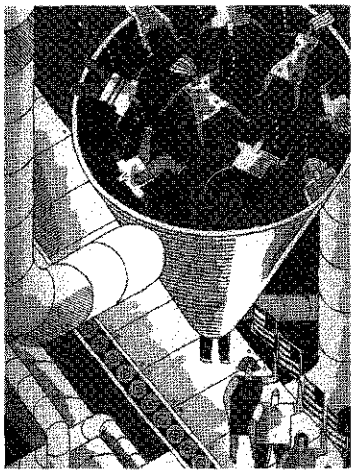

9

30

38

forum

9 Teaching Citizenship
Can schools do the job?
Crafting Good Citizens by STEPHEN MACEDO *Faulty Engineering* by CHESTER E. FINN JR.

features

22 Exploring the Costs of Accountability
No Child Left Behind is no unfunded mandate by JAMES PEYSER & ROBERT COSTRELL

30 A Board's Eye View
Lessons from life in public office by PETER MEYER

38 The Sun Sets on the West
Social studies, the politically correct way by JONATHAN BURACK

44 A Building Need
Charter schools in search of good homes by KIM SMITH & JAMES WILLCOX

research

52 The Race Connection
Are teachers more effective with students who share their ethnicity? by THOMAS S. DEE

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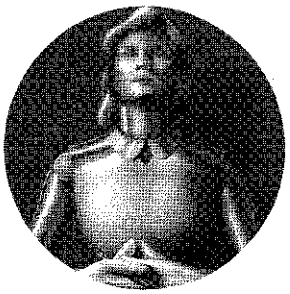
research



60 The Gentleman's "A"
New evidence on the effects of grade inflation
by DAVID N. FIGLIO & MAURICE E. LUCAS

60

whatever happened to...

68 The Open Classroom
Were schools without walls just another fad?
by LARRY CUBAN

check the facts

73 Voucher Research Controversy
New looks at the New York City evaluation
CHECKED by PAUL E. PETERSON & WILLIAM G. HOWELL

from the editors

3 Tough Love by MARTIN WEST

correspondence

4 *Rod Paige on teachers who cheat; the benefits of inclusion*

book reviews

79 The Worm in the Apple: How the Teacher Unions Are Destroying American Education *by Peter Brimelow*
REVIEWED by GEORGE MITCHELL & JULIA E. KOPPICH

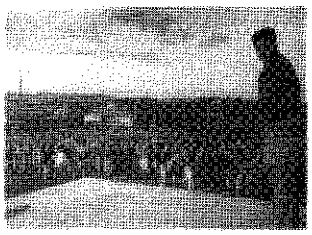
81 California Dreaming: Reforming Mathematics Education *by Suzanne M. Wilson* REVIEWED by RALPH A. RAIMI

82 School Figures: The Data Behind the Debate *by Hanna Skandera & Richard Sousa* REVIEWED by CHESTER E. FINN JR.

83 Book Alert

education matters to me

84 A Kibbutz Education
by AMITAI ETZIONI



84

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VOLUME 4, NUMBER 2

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Tough Love

The value of high grading standards

In my high school, rumor had it that Richard Brockhaus was the toughest grader in the state. Others disagreed. They insisted it was the whole country.

When as a senior I finally braved his Advanced Placement calculus course, Dr. B did nothing to dispel these rumors. For all my efforts, it seemed that I could not live up to his expectations. My grade for the fall semester remains the only C on my academic record.

Dr. B was not wholly devoid of sympathy. A relentless encourager, he constantly reminded us that the material we were trying to learn was "not rocket science." Thus motivated, I managed to improve my grade modestly in the spring.

When we arrived in May to take the course's final exam, to our surprise we found a TV perched awkwardly on Dr. B's desk. In lieu of taking an exam, we would be watching *Stand and Deliver*, the film documenting Jaime Escalante's success in teaching AP calculus to disadvantaged students in East Los Angeles. Apparently our work had met his expectations after all.

Still, those of us who had struggled through the course had little idea of what to expect as we headed into the official AP exam later that month. As it turned out, the College Board's questions were among the easiest we had encountered all year. Dr. B had taught "to the test" and well beyond it; every member of our class passed with flying colors.

Contrast my experiences with those of 300 11th and 12th graders in Boston, Springfield, and Worcester surveyed in 2003 by the Mass Insight Education and Research Institute. In the 10th grade, these students had failed in their first attempt at the statewide Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam.

Yet more than 45 percent of them reported having a B average or better in the 2002–03 academic year; fewer than one in ten reported an average of D or F. This despite the state's insistence that students who do not pass the MCAS demonstrate no more than "a minimal understanding of the subject matter and do not solve simple problems." Their teachers, it would seem, had signaled success when in fact the students were floundering.

Today in Massachusetts, as in many states, students who fail to pass the statewide graduation test are prevented from receiving a diploma. Teachers who hand out misleading grades thereby allow some students, already let down by a school system that has failed to prepare them adequately, to be blindsided. Only because the state provides multiple opportunities to pass the MCAS do such students have some chance at redemption.

Teachers who hand out misleading grades allow some students to be blindsided by state tests.

In this issue, David Figlio and Maurice Lucas take a systematic look at the effects of grading practices on elementary students in Florida ("The Gentleman's 'A'," p. 60). Their findings confirm what Dr. Brockhaus understood: Students learn far more from rigorous teachers than from those with lenient grading standards.

Regrettably, teachers with high standards appear to be as scarce in Florida as they are in Massachusetts. Only 50 percent of students awarded As and 11 percent of those with Bs performed at an A or B level on the corresponding section of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.

Teachers clearly need some discretion in deciding how to distribute grades; situations will arise where they feel the need to award a higher grade than warranted in order to sustain a student's morale or to reward exceptional effort. But grades that are consistently too high send the wrong message. They tend to discourage students from making a serious effort and increase the odds that serious problems will go unidentified until it is too late.

Is the era of unchecked grade inflation already behind us? Perhaps. As external assessments become a regular part of the American education system, parents may demand that report cards offer accurate information about their children's progress. And principals responsible for ensuring that their schools make "adequate yearly progress" will need to ask teachers to keep standards high.

–MARTIN WEST

MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K-12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.

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Cheating teachers

It is shameful that a small minority of teachers feel the need to help their students cheat on tests ("To Catch a Cheat," *Research*, Winter 2004). The issue says something larger about our society that is very hard to fathom and is simply unacceptable.

Brian A. Jacob and Steven D. Levitt should be commended for their excellent work in analyzing this problem and for their concrete recommendations of ways to prevent it. I am pleased that the authors believe that the problem "is not so widespread as to call into question the integrity of the nation's educators," because our teachers really are America's unsung heroes.

It is a travesty and an outrage that the few rotten apples in this study may be used by opponents of educational accountability, like the reforms of the No Child Left Behind Act, to charge that testing should be eliminated because the pressure it brings causes cheating. If someone cheats on his/her job application, we don't blame the form. Cheaters get caught.

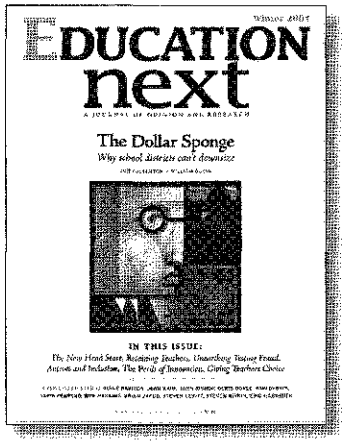
The authors themselves say that their results "show that explicit cheating by school personnel is not likely to be a serious enough problem by itself to call into question high-stakes testing." They astutely point out that extreme cheating is rare and that it would be easy and cheap to eliminate.

With testing and accountability, schools have a powerful tool to monitor the progress of their students. Tests that evaluate students' progress are the key to serving them. There are some who think accountability won't work. They are wrong—of course it will.

ROD PAIGE
U.S. Secretary of Education
Washington, D.C.

The inclusion mandate

While the situation described by Ann Christy Dybvik ("Autism and the Inclusion Mandate," *Feature*, Winter 2004) can and does occur, it is not the norm in special education. In reality, there are many excellent special-education programs around the country, programs that provide highly qualified teachers for students with disabilities. Unfortunately, due to poor working conditions, some students with disabilities are taught by unlicensed teachers and do not get the instruction they need in order to progress.



Dybvik's claim that inclusion is done primarily for social reasons is not accurate. In fact, students with disabilities are placed in general education classes most often because they will make greater gains in these classrooms. During the past 12 years, the period in which inclusion has been used more extensively, the number of students with disabilities who have graduated from high school has tripled; the number attending college has doubled. Also, if students with disabilities are to meet the adequate yearly progress goals set forth in the No Child Left Behind Act, they must have access to the general education curriculum.

To improve special education, we need to ensure full funding so that districts can hire certified special-education teachers; reduce paperwork so special-education teachers have more time for planning and instruction; and provide administrators with training in special education. The Council for Exceptional Children has recommended that all of the above be incorporated into the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

DREW ALLBRITTEN
Executive Director
Council for Exceptional Children
Arlington, Virginia

How to decentralize

The problems of governance structure and budgeting described by Jon Fullerton and William Ouchi ("Mounting Debt" and "Academic Freedom," *Forum*, Winter 2004) are not unique to education. The same problems of overcentralization plague the management of all government enterprises—from policing to transportation to environmental protection.

The constraints placed on public employees most often emerge in response to some specific error (perceived or real) by an employee—an error that we want to ensure never happens again. If one school principal spends public funds on pencils that the public or public officials believe would have been better spent on chalk, we quickly require all principals to spend a specific allocation of funds on chalk. If one teacher uses a curriculum that we believe was ineffective or inappropriate, we quickly demand that all teachers use a required curriculum.

Consequently, to the recommendations offered by Fullerton and Ouchi, let me suggest an additional one: Minimize the potential for scandals and other embarrassments that can create pressures to recentralize authority.

To do this, those who would implement these decentralizing reforms should first seek to explicitly identify the potential indiscretions that are most likely to produce a scandal. They will miss some, of course. But they

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ought to be able to identify the high-probability, big-consequence errors—the mistakes that when exposed by an inspector general, candidate for office, or crusading journalist are most likely to engender a crippling new centralizing requirement.

Second, they should train the people to whom they propose to allocate more discretion to recognize and prevent the most likely and most damaging indiscretions. Superintendents, principals, and teachers need to understand that though their authority is not complete, they are still responsible not only for educating students but also for maintaining citizens' faith in the integrity of public servants and the process of educational governance.

ROBERT D. BEHN
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Jon Fullerton's "tell it like it is" article on financial management is a reminder of how hard it is to manage in the public sector. Our yeasty political pluralism, with its ever-changing policies, multiple presumed leaders competing for influence, high turnover, and multiple layers of governance are enough to make a grown manager cry.

If only we could attract more skilled financial managers to the most challenged school systems. This would be a good project for foundations that want to make the world a better place. Try something really prosaic: improve the financial management staff of urban school systems.

RICHARD P. NATHAN
Director,
Rockefeller Institute of Government
Albany, New York

Finding good leaders

I had always planned to semi-retire into education after I had saved enough in my business career to supplement a teacher's pay. Now that I am moving from the business world to education, I read Frederick Hess's article on educational leadership ("Lifting the Barrier," *Forum*, Fall 2003) with great anticipation. Unfortunately, I found his arguments thin.

The article makes a number of poorly defended assertions. First, Hess argues that a principal does not need to have classroom experience to judge a teacher's performance or to mentor his charges. Teaching is much like the sales profession. Unless you have carried a bag and walked the streets, it is extremely difficult to gain the respect of the sales force. Without the ability to feel their pain, one will be long on punitive sticks and short on supportive carrots.

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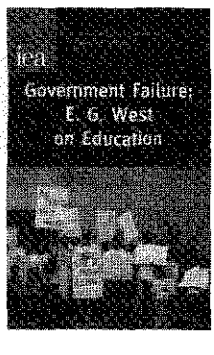

New Publication:

Government Failure:
E.G. West on Education

Edited by James Tooley & James Stanfield
Foreword by Antony Jay
Price $22.50 plus shipping

This publication is a selection of E. G. West's papers containing a wealth of economic and philosophical analysis which can guide policymakers in the field of education. The chapters show how state monopoly provision of education has led to a particular model of schooling which does not work for many of those who use the education system – parents and children - and that it is a model that is least likely to benefit the poor, although they could benefit from programmes to help fund their education.

The editors suggest that are four major arguments in West's work that are especially relevant today. Firstly, the historical record shows that the educational needs of almost everyone, including the poor, were met without the state. Secondly, that the demand for imposing state education was made by important opinion-formers acting on misplaced reasoning and spurious evidence. Thirdly, there are practical ways in which education can be reclaimed from the state, with examples from all over the world (and interesting historical agitation for some of these reforms), and finally, that if education is to be reclaimed from the state, then we are also free to liberate education from 19c ideas of schooling.

In an era when there is increasing dissatisfaction with state education provision, but in which the state has ever greater control of the curriculum – including the teaching of 'citizenship' – and management of schools, the papers in this book have never been more relevant.

2003, Occasional Paper 130, 0-255 36552 7, 212pp

Still Available:

The Global Education Industry

Lessons from Private Education in Developing Countries
James Tooley
Foreword by Birgitta Kantola
Price $22.50 plus shipping

The first edition of this pioneering book produced surprising conclusions from research around the world into the extent of private education. Drawing on examples from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Peru, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and other countries, Professor Tooley gave a snapshot of private education that was unknown to many readers; contrary to expectations, the private education sector was large in the countries studied, was innovative, and was not the exclusive domain of the wealthy. On the contrary, he found that the private sector often provided social responsibility, subsidised places and student loan schemes.

Tooley identifies the factors that impede or facilitate the development of the private education sector in various countries, focusing on the regulatory regimes that may impinge upon private education. This led him to conclude with a proposal for the role of for-profit education enterprises in promoting equitable development.

In this second edition, Professor Tooley contributes a new preface which shows how his work has developed and extended into other countries. In particular, he provides a fascinating account of how private education is flourishing in China.

2002, 1999, Hobart Paper 141, ISBN 0-255 36503-9, 192pp

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Second, Hess believes that graduate programs leading to an administrative certificate do not provide effective quality control. His evidence is that the standardized test scores of students earning MBAs are higher than those of doctoral candidates in the same universities' schools of education. It is clear that the higher compensation and competitive challenge available in business attracts more capable candidates; that is the state of our values, not a condemnation of our education schools.

I plan to take the best available path in attempting to become a great administrator. I have acquired some business and leadership experience; now I plan to pay my dues to acquire the practical experience and relationships to become a well-rounded school leader.

MIKE FREEDMAN
Oceanside, California

To those who worry that the compensation afforded to principals and superintendents is not high enough to attract good talent (Thomas B. Fordham Institute and the Broad Foundation, "The Power to Perform," *Forum*, Fall 2003), I would refer them to the extensive literature on what drives job satisfaction and performance. In short, it is not about the money. Give a principal or superintendent a clear mandate and clear expectations; a reasonable timeframe in which to meet those expectations; and the freedom to act decisively on staffing, budget allocations, and curriculum, and you will find no shortage of talented applicants. Interestingly, the same holds true in every other human enterprise.

MARK NASSUTTI
Redmond, Washington

Civic education

In "Tug of War" (*Research*, Fall 2003), James B. Murphy argues that "the attempt to inculcate civic values in our schools is at best ineffective and often undermines the intrinsic moral purpose of schooling."

Murphy's first argument relies on the empirical claim that civics classes are ineffective because they do not "foster desirable knowledge, attitudes, and conduct." He cites "influential research by [M. Kent] Jennings and Kenneth Langton [which] found that the high-school civics curriculum had little effect on any aspect of civic values." Murphy is referring to a 1968 article that derived its conclusions from asking students just six miscellaneous factual questions.

Murphy concedes that this picture has been complicated by Richard Niemi and Jane Junn's book *Civic Education: What Makes Students Learn*

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(1998). As Murphy summarizes their argument, Niemi and Junn "found that, although the civics curriculum had much less effect on civic knowledge and values than did the home environment, civics courses did make some difference.... However, as with earlier studies, Niemi and Junn found that civics courses had virtually no effect on attitudes."

In fact, Niemi and Junn write that "the evidence points strongly in the direction of course effects" on students' attitudes as well as knowledge. They analyzed the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics assessment, which asked only two questions about values or attitudes. Thus the authors recognize that they have little data on attitudes. Nevertheless, the courses seem to raise students' scores on the only two attitudes that were measured: confidence in government and belief in the value of elections.

Niemi and Junn further cite an extensive body of research—all produced after Jennings and Langton's work—showing that civics classes do help to make young people into knowledgeable, engaged, and/or concerned citizens.

More recently, Judith Torney-Purta's analysis of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's civics assessment (given to 90,000 14-year-olds in 28 countries) found that civics instruction correlates, controlling for demographic factors, with improved civics knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Likewise, according to *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait* (a survey of Americans conducted in 2002), students who reported that their teachers led discussions of politics and government were more involved in their communities and more attentive to the news than other students.

To be sure, there are principled disagreements about what makes a good citizen. At the same time, there is an enormous amount of common ground, as evidenced by the detailed recommendations in the *Civic Mission of Schools*, a report issued jointly in 2003 by the Carnegie Corporation and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE). This report was written and endorsed by self-identified liberal and conservative scholars and representatives of groups as diverse as the Heritage Foundation, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Council for the Social Studies, and the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Murphy reminds us of the poten-

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tial tension between teaching the truth and trying to make the right kinds of citizens. However, his reading of the empirical literature is inaccurate and incomplete, and he overlooks a broad consensus on goals. There is much more basis for optimism about civics than he admits.

PETER LEVINE
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland

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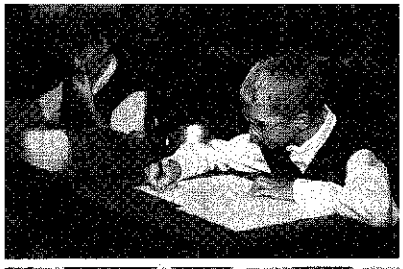

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Not getting it

I was pleased to see Lynne V. Cheney's review of Kieran Egan's *Getting It Wrong from the Beginning: Our Progressivist Inheritance from Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget* ("Progressively Worse," Fall 2003). Egan is one of the few writers on education who thinks outside the box.

The irony is that although Cheney has little use for the progressives, her own rather conventional ideological critique is dwarfed by the power, originality, and range of Egan's attack. It is almost as if she is reluctant to come to grips with an argument mounted on historical, intellectual, and imaginative grounds instead of one framed by political positions.

Egan's critique exposes progressivism's historical roots in the potent Darwinian metaphor of evolution-toward-progress. Developmental psychology has produced a body of theory, experimentation, and statistical analysis controlled by the assumption that a child's brain will change, evolve, and progress. The charting and understanding of that progress is the thing of interest.

But if we free ourselves of the developmental cliché, we may think of the brain as more like an eye. Since eyes don't change in dramatic ways, the eye metaphor might lead us to become less interested in whatever changes we could register inside the brain itself. We might spend more time thinking about things outside the brain that could offer the best kinds of stimulation and training to that organ, such as a demanding curriculum. By focusing on the development of the brain rather than culture and curriculum, progressives have squandered untold resources on unfruitful developmental research and theory, on stale positivism.

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Civic Education

Can public schools teach good citizenship?

DECLINING VOTER PARTICIPATION AMONG the young. Persistently low scores on national civics and history assessments. High-school graduates who can't find Iraq on a globe.

These are just some of the symptoms of civic education gone awry. To some observers, they suggest that efforts to teach students the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in democratic life are at best ineffective. Others believe that the schools are simply not trying hard enough. And still others question whether public schools should even be involved in shaping students' civic values.

To some degree, education will always be civic in nature. But where should the lines be drawn? Who should determine what will be taught? And how can the nation ensure that students emerge with an understanding of their country's history and most cherished values?

[illegible] wonders if critics of civics truly care about public institutions

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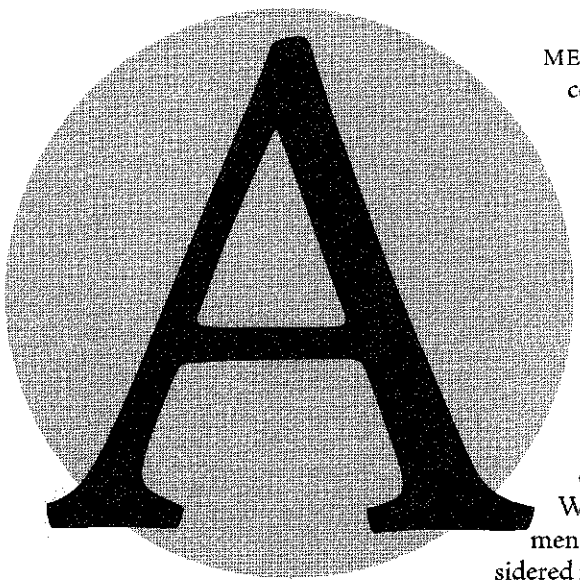
crafting Good Citizens



AMERICANS ARE RIGHTLY CONcerned that schools are not providing students with the knowledge and habits necessary to be good citizens. With the notable exception of volunteer activity, every form of civic engagement among the young has declined. About half of those aged 18 to 29 voted in the 1972 presidential election. By the 1996 election, however, the share had dropped to less than one-third. While 58 percent of college freshmen polled by UCLA in 1966 considered it important to keep up with politics, only 26 percent thought so by the end of the 1990s. Even though young Americans are more educated than ever before, they pay far less attention than previous generations did to traditional news sources like newspapers and network television. And few of them use new media such as the Internet to replace traditional sources of news about world events.

In response to these trends, increasing attention is being paid to civic education in the schools. But strangely, at a moment when the schools seem capable of becoming a bulwark against civic *dis*engagement among the young, a rising chorus of skeptics is casting doubt on the whole enterprise of civic education. In practice, they charge, civic education is ineffective and potentially harmful. The materials used in social studies courses, where most schooling about the political process occurs, are too often built on a foundation of moral relativism, cynicism toward received traditions, and, as Chester Finn puts it, "Undue deference to the '*pluribus*' at the expense of the '*unum*.'"

Critics also question the very idea of government-sponsored civic

Public schools can —and should— teach students to become active participants in democratic life

by STEPHEN MACEDO

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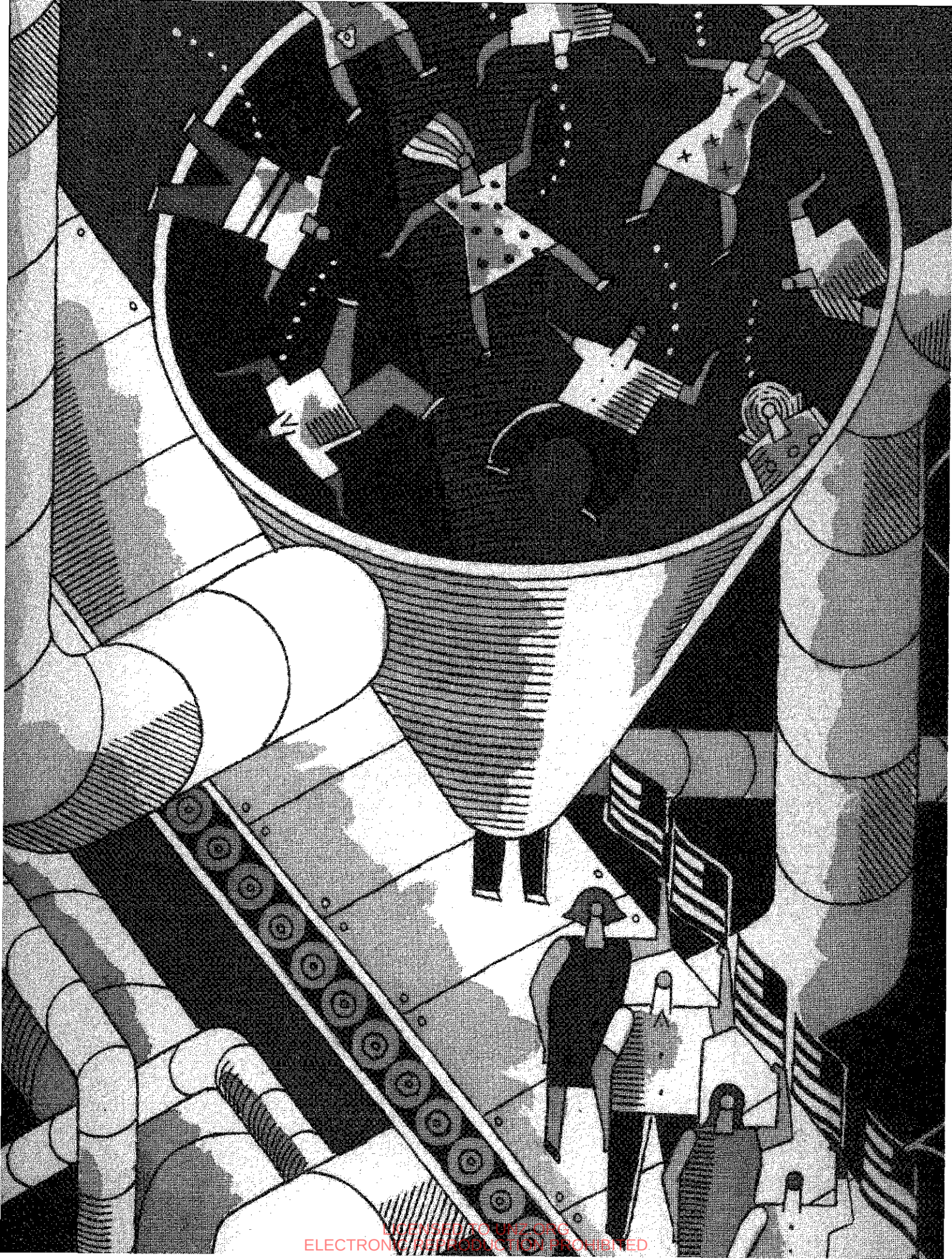

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education, arguing that it threatens basic principles of intellectual freedom. It would be far better, they say, to leave the teaching of values to parents, churches, and private schools. Thus we would avoid the sorry spectacle of government's promoting some values at the expense of others.

So how should we assess civic education as public policy? Let's consider three fundamental questions:

- Is it true that civic education makes no difference or even undermines students' interest and participation in civic life?

- Have the efforts to promote civic engagement been sufficient to conclude that the experiment has failed?

- Are the differences in values among Americans truly so vast that it will be impossible to develop a reasonable public consensus on the goals of civic education?

Until the 1960s, it was common for high-school students to take as many as three courses in civics, democracy, and government. Today, however, most students take only one government-related course.

The answers to each of these questions, I will argue, give us substantial reasons to doubt the skeptical position on civic education. However, I am not at all sure that those who wish to eliminate civics from the public schools care much about finding out the facts. Their interest in maligning civic education may stem from a desire not to improve the content of public schooling but to undermine public institutions altogether.

Critics' interest in maligning civic education may stem from a

Does Civic Education Work?

It is important, first, not to exaggerate what schools can accomplish in this sphere. After all, families are the primary socializers in our society, and the mass media shape children's attitudes in pervasive ways. We cannot expect schools by themselves to transform apathetic, self-absorbed consumers into active and engaged citizens. Nevertheless, the best available evidence suggests that teaching students about current events, the political process, and how to get involved can make them more willing and able to practice good citizenship.

Consider the findings summarized in an excellent recent report, *The Civic Mission of Schools*, issued by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement:

- Formal instruction in the key elements of American history and the nation's governmental structure and processes is a crucial building block of civic education.

- Active discussion of current local, national, and international events should be incorporated into the classroom, especially issues of interest to young people. This can improve students' critical thinking and communica-

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tion skills and promote the discussion of political issues outside the classroom.

✦ More than 80 percent of high-school seniors are already participating in some form of volunteer activity, which is one bright spot in the civic landscape. Nevertheless, more could be done to link community service with classroom instruction as well as other civic and political activities.

✦ Extracurricular activities have long been known to contribute to students' tendencies to become and remain civically engaged, even after decades have passed.

✦ Giving students a voice in the management of the classroom and the school may well increase civic skills and attitudes.

✦ Participating in simulations of democratic institutions may increase students' political knowledge, skills, and interest, though the data are not conclusive.

Despite these benefits of civic education, it turns out that the skeptics are already getting their way in many respects. Until the 1960s, it was common for high-school students to take as many as three courses in civics, democracy, and government. Today, however, most students take only one government-related course. According to the Carnegie report, social studies courses also appear to be in decline. Community service is widely encouraged in high schools, but it is too often separate from the rest of the curriculum. Meanwhile, the singular focus of high-stakes testing on students' math and reading scores largely ignores civic knowledge. Likewise, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) offers a civics assessment only once every ten years. This sends the signal that civic education matters very little.

If public schools are failing to teach civic knowledge, it is at least partly because they are not trying. To simply throw up our hands and say that public education agencies should now withdraw from civic education seems nothing short of perverse.

Uncommon Values?

The critics' answer is that even if civic education does work, it is simply not a role that the state should undertake in a free society—or at least in a diverse society such as ours, where there are vast disagreements over political and moral values.

If public schools are failing to teach civic knowledge, it is at least partly because THEY ARE NOT TRYING.

But do our differences make it impossible for us to arrive at reasonable consensus standards on the goals of civic education? To my mind, the answer is no. In fact, the nation has already developed reasonable national standards for the teaching of civics. The NAEP standards read:

> Twelfth-grade students performing at the Proficient level should have a good understanding of how constitutions can limit the power of government and support the rule of law. They should be able to distinguish between parliamentary systems of government and those based on separate and shared powers, and they should be able to describe the structure and functions of American government. These students should be able to identify issues in which fundamental democratic values and principles are in conflict—liberty and equality, individual rights and the common good, majority rule and minority rights, for example, and they should be able to take and defend positions on these issues.

On the 1998 NAEP civics exam, just 26 percent of high-school seniors qualified as "proficient." This is because the standards are genuinely demanding and because, as already noted, the schools are not making an adequate effort to teach civics. If anything, the NAEP civics standards, like the national standards formulated by the Center for the Study of Civic Education (a project in which I participated), might be criticized for being somewhat old-fashioned. Nevertheless, they are good mainstream standards, establishing an appropriate base of civic knowledge and competence that should be attained by all children. The same is true of the NAEP standards for the teaching of U.S. history. These standards do not emphasize indoctrination at the expense of critical thinking. On the contrary, the history standards say things like: students "should be able to communicate reasoned interpretations of past events, using historical evidence effectively to support their positions."

desire to undermine public institutions altogether.

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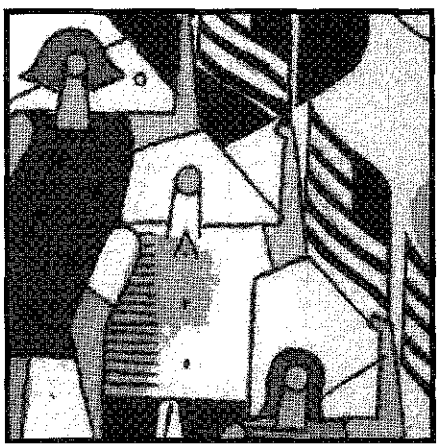
What do critics find so bothersome there?

Critics rightly point to serious flaws in some guidelines offered for the teaching of social studies. The National Council for the Social Studies—the main professional organization in this field—has put forth guidelines that are less concerned with students' basic knowledge of civics and history than with encouraging students to develop a "personal perspective" so they can make "choices." Of course there are good and bad standards and practices for civic education. So why can't critics chip in and promote the good standards? It would be deeply unfortunate for them not to do so based on the misguided conviction that the whole enterprise of civic education is wrong in principle.



Education and Indoctrination

But what of the "Orwellian" paradox of the government of a free people dictating political values in the name of civic education? In the pages of *Education Next*, James B. Murphy has argued that all education should aim to instill only academic and intellectual virtues—the love of learning and the critical pursuit of truth—and that this is incompatible with efforts to inculcate particular convictions such as "my country is good" (see "Tug of War," *Research*, Fall 2003).

The assumption here seems to be that civic education will inevitably devolve into indoctrination—an assumption that is typically backed by some admittedly objectionable statements found in one social studies curriculum or another. However, most civic educators properly distinguish between empty propaganda and genuine education. To the extent that civic education involves teaching students about the structure of their government, the workings of the political process, and the issues that are debated in the public sphere, there is nothing essentially "Orwellian" about civic education or public schooling.

What of Murphy's argument that schooling should promote only intellectual virtues like love of learning, not moral values or other political virtues? This proposal has the twin defects of being impossible and unattractive. Civic education is inseparable from education: no teacher could run a classroom, no principal could run a school, without taking a stand on a wide range of civic values and moral and political virtues. How could you conduct a classroom without taking a stand on gender equality? Are you going to treat boys and girls the same or not? Are you going to treat all religions in a tolerant manner? Do you care equally about the education of rich kids and poor kids? It would be nothing short of bizarre for schools to confine themselves to promoting only "academic" or "intellectual" virtues while leaving aside democratic virtues such as basic equality of concern and respect for all people. Important moral and political values constrain and shape the way we conceive of and advance the intellectual enterprise.

IT WOULD BE NOTHING SHORT OF BIZARRE for schools to confine themselves to promoting only "academic" or "intellectual" virtues.

Education and indoctrination are indeed two very different things, but to describe classroom learning as "academic" or "intellectual" as opposed to "civic" misses the extent to which our conception of learning is infused with democratic values. It is quixotic and misguided to think we should, or even can, get civic education out of the schools. Civic education is not only legitimate; it is inescapable. All education, properly undertaken, has a civic element.

The public has not only a right but also a responsibility to ensure

Chester Finn's solution for the potentially indoctrinating effects of civic education is to allow parents to choose which schools—and thereby which civic traditions—they want for their children. But indoctrination is wrong in any school, whether public or private, secular or religious. Perhaps, however, the skeptics are not interested in civic education that teaches children about government and politics and encourages critical thinking about the major issues of the day. The argument that private schools are best equipped to deliver civic education may be driven by a different conception of what the term includes. It is sometimes argued that a *robust* civic and moral education requires the teach-

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ing of values and virtues about which parents disagree. Because a robust education is necessarily controversial, it can happen only if parents can choose schools that reflect their personal moral and religious convictions.

This argument is worrisome. It certainly throws the whole distinction between education and indoctrination out the window. Indoctrination is antieducational whether it is undertaken by the government or by parents and churches. Parents already control much of what children learn. It may be that schooling would improve if parents were able to exercise more choices, but in the absence of common standards and accountability for the teaching of required subjects like civics, I would worry about whether nonpublic schools could be trusted to fulfill our aims for public education. The public has not only a right but also a responsibility to ensure that all publicly funded schools educate according to reasonable public standards.

The Persistence of Public Education

Previous research has shown that Catholic schools apparently do a better job than public schools of producing active and engaged future citizens. However, the "Catholic school advantage" with respect to civic education does not carry over to all private schools. Indeed, while the evidence is thin, it suggests that evangelical schools promote higher levels of civic engagement but also greater intolerance. In any case, enthusiasm for school choice should not lead us to ignore the importance of either civic education in public schools or public standards for civic education in all schools.

The fact is that we are not walking away from public schooling. The voucher revolution shows no sign of happening. The current system serves the interests of many if not most Americans, especially suburbanites removed from the problems of inner-city neighborhoods and schools. Therefore, we ought to think about how public schools can do a better job of promoting civic engagement. It makes no sense to simply trust private markets, private communities, or private choices to deliver on such an important public goal.

As publicly funded school choice expands incrementally—as I believe it will and (if properly regulated) should—there will need to be an increased focus on public standards and accountability for civic education. The public has a basic and legitimate interest in regulating what is taught in all publicly funded schools. And it is very hard for me to see how civic education—knowledge of how the political process works and of the major events and conflicts in American history—does not count among the essential branches of a child's education. In addition, the idea of civic education is popular with young people as well as adults—strong majorities of young people favor making civics classes mandatory in middle and high school. The extensive experience of other nations with publicly funded school choice also suggests that public dollars will inevitably be accompanied by extensive public expectations and regulations.

For all their admitted flaws, civic education courses and other school-based programs to promote civic engagement can and do make a positive difference. Moreover, research on civic education has expanded in recent years and become more sophisticated—we have begun to figure out what works. Meanwhile, good mainstream consensus standards for civic education have been articulated. These standards no doubt could be improved, but they have earned and deserve a reasonable bipartisan consensus. We have no reason for cynicism about civic education. Advocates of school choice should embrace the opportunity to demonstrate that private schools can do a good job at civic education, and common standards and testing are the only way to do so.

But do conservative critics care about civic education? The Bush administration came into office arguing for a renewed national commitment to service and citizenship (a fact that suggests civic education is not as ideologically contentious as critics charge). National service and volunteerism were keynotes of the president's 2002 State of the Union Address, following the tragic events of September 11, 2001. National service and civic education programs were reorganized, under an impressive leadership team, as the USA Freedom Corps. The White House called for a major increase in spending on service and programs for civic education. And where did all these noble efforts go? The current budget calls for a massive cut in the national service spending in order to help pay for tax cuts. So it's all a question of priorities.

that publicly funded schools meet reasonable public standards.

In the end, critics of public schooling and civic education—and there is much to criticize—need to decide whether to join the efforts to fix what's broken or to continue simply trashing public institutions.

–Stephen Macedo is a professor of politics and director of the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University.

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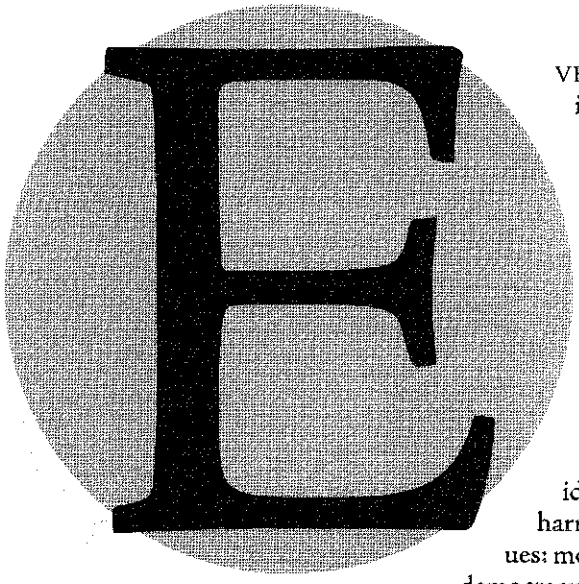
The diversity of values within American society renders public schools ill-equipped to produce the engaged citizens our democracy requires

faulty Engineering



by CHESTER E. FINN JR.

EVERY SOCIETY CREATES MECHANISMS FOR TEACHing its young what they must know to become contributing citizens. Yet in a liberal democracy such as the United States, the proper ordering of those mechanisms is beset by paradox: if free citizens are to rule the state, does the state have a legitimate role in shaping their values and beliefs via its public schools, universities, and other institutions?

Because Americans insist that government is the creature of its citizens, we are loath to rely on state decisions and institutions to instruct our children in how to think, how to conduct themselves, and what to believe. After all, civic education may sound like a good idea in theory, but in practice public schools could even do harm in this realm. Some educators harbor worrisome values: moral relativism, atheism, doubts about the superiority of democracy, undue deference to the *"pluribus"* at the expense of the *"unum,"* discomfort with patriotism, cynicism toward established cultural conventions and civic institutions. Transmitting those values to children will gradually erode the foundations of a free society. Perhaps society would be better off if its schools stuck to the three Rs and did a solid job in domains where they enjoy both competence and wide public support.

However, a free society is not self-maintaining. Its citizens must know something about democracy and about individual rights and responsibilities. They must also learn how to behave in a law-abiding way, respecting basic societal norms and values. Thus all educational institutions, especially primary and secondary schools, would seem to have an obligation to help transmit these core ideas, habits, and skills. Indeed, we fret when we learn of schools that *neglect* this role—the more so in a dangerous world where attacks on American values and institutions (and people) make it more important than ever to rear children who understand and prize those values.

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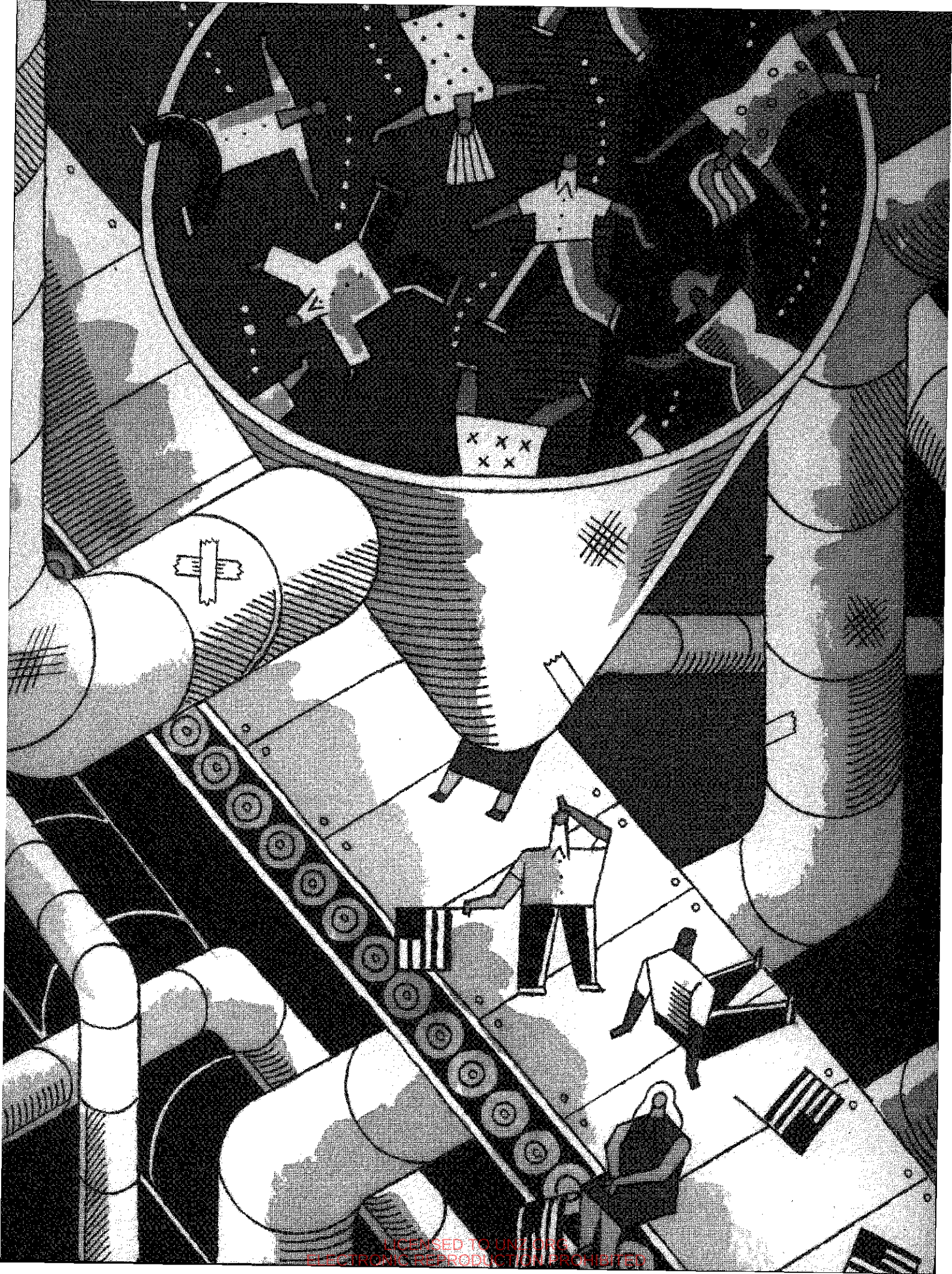

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MANY YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THAT THEIR STATE HAS TWO SENATORS and have difficulty distinguishing the New Deal from a poker game.

One of the more effective debating points scored against voucher plans, for example, is the charge that "Klan schools," "witchcraft schools," and "fundamentalist madrasas" will qualify for public subsidy while imparting malign values to their pupils. Yet should government define which values are sound? And how is that different from an Orwellian regime of authoritarianism and theocracy? A fine dilemma indeed.

Standards and Civics

Our quandaries grow more vexing still as the standards movement transfers key decisions about the content of education from local neighborhoods and communities to distant policymakers in state and national capitals.

Under federal law, every state must now have statewide standards in reading, math, and science, and nearly every state has also developed standards in social studies and other important areas of the school curriculum. Social studies standards typically focus not only on history, geography, economics, and government, but also on citizenship, social norms, and the like. Here, for example, is the opening of New Jersey's description of its "core curriculum content standards for social studies":

> Citizen participation in government is essential in forming this nation's democracy, and is vital in sustaining it. Social studies education promotes loyalty and love of country and it prepares students to participate intelligently in public affairs. Its component disciplines foster in students the knowledge and skills needed to make sense of current political and social issues. By studying history, geography, American government and politics, and other nations, students can learn to contribute to national, state, and local decisionmaking. They will also develop an understanding of the American constitutional system, an active awareness and commitment to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, a tolerance for those with whom they disagree, and an understanding of the world beyond the borders of the United States.

A worthy aspiration indeed, yet one that is rarely attained. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that U.S. schools have failed even to impart basic information to children about their country's history and how its government and civil institutions work. For example, just 26 percent of U.S. high-school seniors attained the "proficient" level on the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress civics exam. Just 11 percent reached that level on the 2001 assessment of U.S. history. (Fifty-seven percent scored below the "basic" level on that assessment.)

If young people don't know that their state has two senators, don't understand the separation of powers, cannot explain the causes of the Civil War, and have difficulty distinguishing the New Deal from a poker game, what chance is there that they are acquiring—from the schools, anyway—"an active awareness and commitment to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship"? Is it not imperative for schools to establish a solid foundation of basic knowledge on which values, attitudes, and behaviors can securely rest?

Outside the Classroom

There's good news, too, but of a perverse sort: the very limits of schooling—both its ineffectiveness and the relatively small place it occupies in children's lives—leave ample room for other influences to work on youngsters' civic values and behavior. Parents, neighbors, churches, scouts, girls and boys clubs, the media—all play a significant role in sculpting children's understanding of the world around them. America has a vibrant civil society that does a decent job of forging good citizens even if the schools don't. That's why so many young Americans do obey the law (if not necessarily the speed limit), do volunteer, do help old people across the street, do serve valiantly in the military, and so forth.

But we also know that many young Americans don't vote, don't read the newspaper, don't serve their communities, and show dwindling interest in current affairs. Worse, there is the huge problem of young people whose lives are influenced mainly by gangs, street culture, hip hop, and the worst of movies and television. These young people lack good role models at home and have few ties to civil society.

Which brings the problem into clearer focus. Let me recap. First, we are ambivalent about the role of the schools in teaching citizenship. Second, U.S. schools don't do a very good job today, either on the cognitive side or on the attitudinal and behavioral side. Third, though nearly all children suffer from the schools' shortcomings on the cognitive side, many fare reasonably well when it comes to the behavioral aspects of citizenship, thanks to other healthy influences in

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Americans hold strong but often diverging views about the values they want their children to acquire.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY IMAGES

their lives. Fourth, young people without such influences are doubly victimized by the schools' failings—because they have little with which to compensate, either in acquiring knowledge or in forging decent civic values.

The Pitfalls of Civics Education

Can this knot of problems be untangled and solved? Many are trying. Innumerable foundations, commissions, state initiatives, and federal programs are now seeking to renew civic education in American schools. But solutions run headlong into a series of barriers. Four of these seem especially troublesome.

✦ First, efforts to develop a civics curriculum are snagged by a basic truth about America: beyond a narrow core of shared beliefs (honesty, tolerance, obeying the law), Americans hold strong but often divergent views about the values they want their children to acquire and about the role of teachers and schools in inculcating those values. It may, therefore, be impossible for the publicly operated schools of a society that is so diverse to do a good job of forging citizens. Consider the challenge of deciding what experiences constitute "service learning" for high-school students in jurisdictions where this is now expected as part of a civics class or social studies curriculum. Does volunteering in one's church qualify? In an abortion clinic? Bringing coffee and donuts to grateful GIs at the nearby military base? Leading a protest against military action? When adults heatedly disagree about the value of such activities, how can a democracy's public schools decide on their proper role in the lives and education of the young?

Fierce watchdog groups constantly scrutinize the public schools for signs of religiosity. Activists pressure schools to redefine "civic education" in terms of influencing public policy and engaging in political activity—while giving short shrift to being a good parent, dependable neighbor, and conscientious member of the nongovernmental institutions that compose civil society. And everybody gangs up on textbooks, which are afflicted by hypersensitivity to the possibility of bias or controversy. This baleful influence comes from both the left and the right.

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Hence much gets omitted from class materials and much of what remains has been sanitized to the point of banality. This has the effect of depriving schools and teachers of many of the stories, books, poems, plays, and legends from which children might best learn the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, hero and villain, patriot and traitor. Moreover, the fear of being criticized by pressure groups encourages curriculum writers and textbook publishers to make their instructional materials value-free from the outset.

✦ Second, within the field of civics education, a battle rages between those who believe that the schools' responsibility is mainly cognitive (imparting specific knowledge to children) and those who insist that youngsters' behavior and attitudes are what schools should work on. It's one thing to explain the role of voting in a democracy, for example, but quite another to help young people acquire the habit of voting or internalize a sense of obligation that they must vote. For many civic educators, these habits, beliefs, and dispositions matter more than "book learning." For example, a recent Carnegie Corporation report, *The Civic Mission of Schools*, offers four takes on "competent and responsible citizens." The first of these says such citizens are "informed and thoughtful," which can mesh with a cognitive view of the school's role. But the other three—"participate in their communities," "act politically," and "have moral and civic virtues"—are harder to instill through conventional books and teaching. They rekindle old debates about the propriety and competency of schools' intruding into people's beliefs and behaviors.

Recall that, in the 1980s, a number of states poked into students' values and behavior through what was termed "outcomes-based" education. This began innocently and earnestly, as a logical response to the era's focus on school results rather than simply inputs. As it spread to include pupil attitudes, actions, and ideologies, however, many people balked at what they saw as government imposing patterns of behavior and thought on children under the guise of mandatory academic standards. For example, the Minnesota state board of education proposed in 1991 that high-school graduation should hinge on students' contributing to "global communities" and the "economic well-being of society," understanding the "interdependency of people," and "working cooperatively in groups." Rightly or not, some parents and religious leaders held that these smacked of socialism and one-worldism, if not Marxism, and that the state had no business imposing such things on its young people. The upshot was that most jurisdictions pulled back to the more strictly cognitive domains.

✦ Third, there are the limits of schooling itself. Between birth and age 18, a typical young American spends just 14 percent of waking hours beneath the school roof. That's barely enough time to cover reading, writing, and arithmetic well, much less to offset the harmful influences that may be at work on children during the other 86 percent of their lives. In response, one may want the school day or year to lengthen, and many good schools, especially those serving disadvantaged students, have striven to enlarge their portion of children's lives. But the overwhelming majority of schools start at about 8 a.m. and end around 2 p.m. Moreover, they are in session for only half the days in the year. Nor do children go near a public school until the age of five or six. How large a share of responsibility for shaping tomorrow's citizens is it practical for those schools to shoulder?

✦ Fourth and finally, the civic and pedagogical values of many educators differ from those of many parents. Faithful to "progressive" traditions and postmodern beliefs, too many education school professors signal to future teachers that they should abjure firm distinctions between right and wrong. Nowhere is this more evident than in the social studies—the part of the curriculum that is commonly held responsible for civics education.

The man in the street probably supposes that social studies consist mainly of history and civics, leavened with some geography and economics. At the end of a well-taught K–12 social studies sequence, one would expect young people to know at least who Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt were, why World War II was fought, how to find Italy and Iraq on a map, and what "supply and demand" mean.

If that were so, school-based social studies would contribute to the forging of citizens, at least on the cognitive side. But that's not what animates the experts who rule this field. They are more concerned with imparting multiple "perspectives" to students, as described in a position paper of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS):

> Students should be helped to construct a personal perspective that enables them to explore emerging events and persistent or recurring issues, considering implications for self, family, and the whole national and world community. This perspective involves respect for differences of opinion and preference; of race, religion, and gender; of class and ethnicity; and of culture in general. This construction should be based on the realization that differences exist among individuals and the conviction that this diversity can be positive and socially enriching.

One may or may not find these to be valid goals for social

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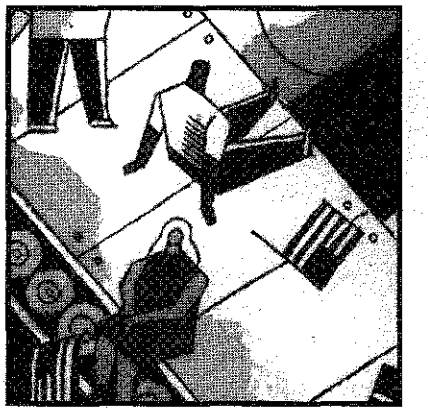
SCHOOL CHOICE ACCOMMODATES the divergent views of parents and educators rather than settling for lowest-common-denominator consensus.



studies, but it's reasonably safe to say that, as a framework for civics education in particular, they will stir dissent from American parents, voters, and taxpayers. Thus a clash is inevitable between what we can term the social studies view of civics and the popular view. Indeed, such a clash has been under way for decades. "During the 1930s," writes New York University scholar Diane Ravitch, "one national report after another insisted that social studies should replace chronological history and that young people should study immediate personal and social problems rather than the distant, irrelevant past."

Diversity in Civics Education

Can education reformers overcome these four barriers and place American schools on a sure-footed path to effective civics education? I think not, at least not through top-down reform strategies that emphasize uniform school practices, and certainly not as long as the real pressure for performance and accountability centers on reading and math.

There is, however, another possibility for strengthening civics education. It is to be found in the reform strategy known as school choice. Besides its other strengths, school choice sidesteps one of the big obstacles to better civic education: it accommodates the divergent views and priorities of ethnic and religious groups, parents, and educators, and allows them to tailor the approach to civics that they favor for their children rather than settling for awkward efforts at lowest-common-denominator consensus. Parents who decide that a given school's approach is not right for their daughters and sons are free to make other selections.

The accompanying risk is balkanization: discordant approaches to civic education as one school emphasizes Athenian values while another stresses those of Sparta. In response, choice proponents cite evidence that private school students are more civically engaged than their public school peers. They remind us that government-operated schools are doomed to do a lackluster job in this area. And they note that, as long as states retain the authority to establish core academic standards for all public schools, they have the opportunity to mitigate curricular balkanization, even in such fractious fields as social studies.

Although certain forms of school choice (tax credits, some voucher programs) abjure state academic standards and tests, others (such as charter schools and public school choice) normally take them for granted. Hence if the state—or other cognizant authority—can get its civics standards right, can attach decent assessments to them, and can steel itself to insist that student performance in this field "counts," it will go a considerable distance toward infusing both standards-based and choice-based education reform with a decent possibility of making a difference in this field.

But those are enormous ifs. All the aforementioned obstacles in society and within the education profession impede any large political unit (such as a state) from attaining consensus about what should be in its civics standards—much less tying an enforcement regimen to them. Today's pressure to boost math and reading achievement makes it less likely that the requisite political energy and resources can be mustered on behalf of a field like civics. The fractures within social studies and the ambivalence of parents will tend to deter public officials from even trying very hard. Moreover, the aspects of civics that can be spelled out in academic standards and accurately assessed through statewide tests are almost entirely cognitive: well worth learning, to be sure, even a necessary precondition for successful adult life, but not exactly what people have in mind when they say that schools should forge "responsible citizens."

In the end, we may need to accept the fact that the school's—and the state's—role in this domain is simply limited: by its meager portion of children's lives, by its pedagogical weakness, by the absence of political and intellectual consensus, and by the modest capabilities of state standards and tests. We may do well to acknowledge that the solemn duty of readying young people for successful participation in adult society depends at least as much—and perhaps quite a lot more—on what happens to them when they are not in school.

–Chester E. Finn Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, and senior editor of Education Next. *An earlier version of this essay appeared in Peter Berkowitz, ed.,* Never a Matter of Indifference: Sustaining Virtue in a Free Republic *(Hoover Institution Press, 2003).*

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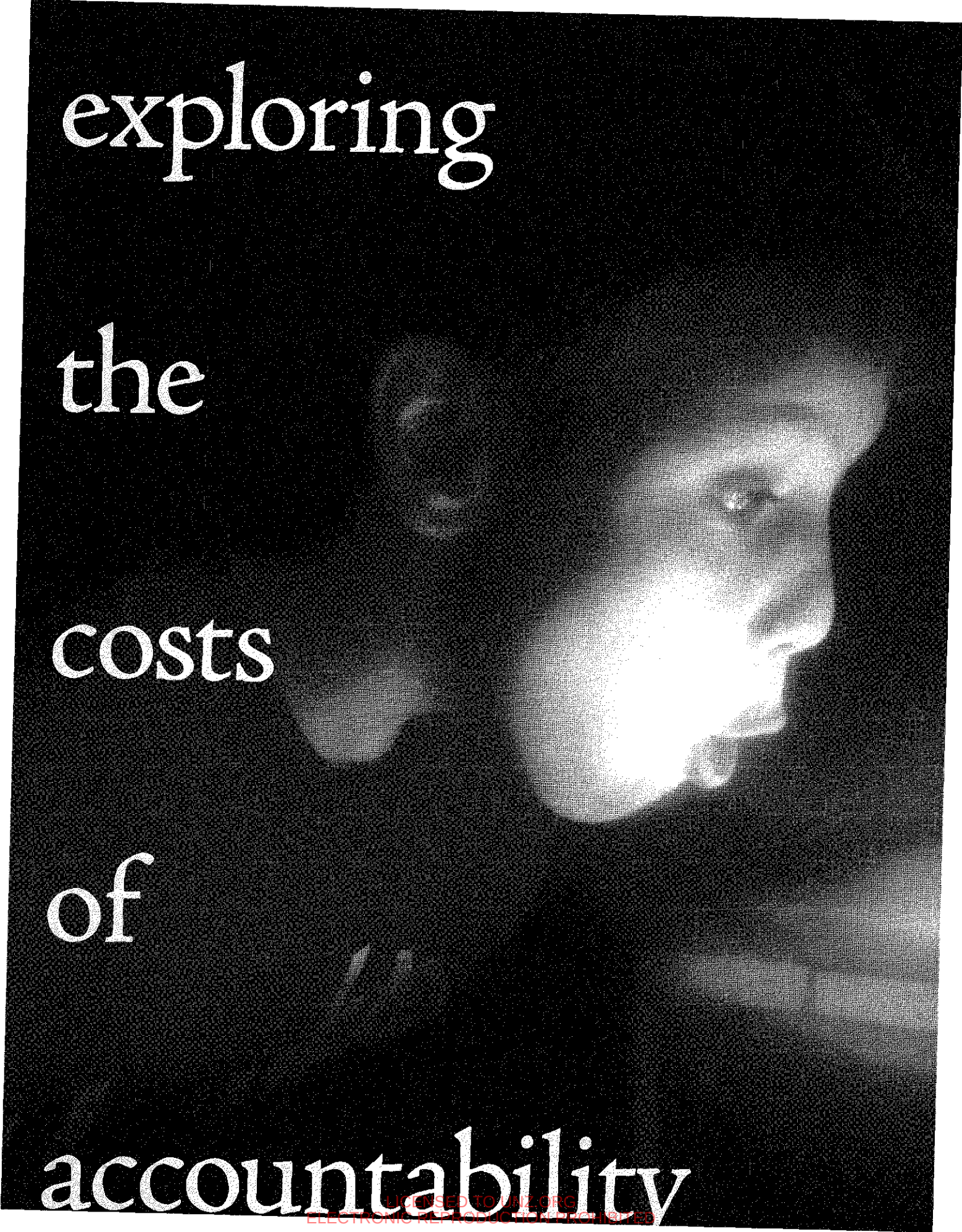
exploring the costs of accountability



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Claims that the No Child Left Behind Act *represents an "unfunded mandate"* **wilt under close scrutiny**

by JAMES PEYSER & ROBERT COSTRELL

How much will the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) cost? Critics argue that NCLB's requirement that states bring all students up to academic proficiency by the year 2014 represents a massive unfunded mandate. William J. Mathis, for example, claims in a recent *Phi Delta Kappan* article that public K–12 spending needs to rise by at least 20 to 35 percent to meet the goals of NCLB—an increase of $85 to $150 billion a year. These critics reason that unless the feds put a lot more money on the table, financially strapped state and local governments will be forced to raise taxes sharply. Otherwise, the entire reform effort could collapse of its own weight.

The funding issue has three components. First is the cost of designing and implementing a statewide testing system. Second is the cost of establishing a state-level system for evaluating schools and districts and for intervening in those schools that continuously underperform. Third, and most controversial, is the cost of ensuring that schools have enough resources to provide the high-quality

PHOTOGRAPH BY CORBIS

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educational opportunities that students need to meet the academic standards required by NCLB.

We have examined these three components in light of our own experiences in Massachusetts. Since Massachusetts embarked on a path similar to that mandated by NCLB well before the law's adoption and has proceeded further than most other states, its experience may be useful in evaluating what is required nationally.

Our analysis suggests that many critics greatly exaggerate the shortfall of federal resources. Specifically,

- Federal spending to develop and administer mandated assessments is adequate for now, but will need to increase over time. The needed dollar amounts are relatively small and could be met easily by reallocating funds from lower-priority programs.
- Federal support of school evaluation and technical assistance, required under NCLB, is underfunded. This gap is likely to grow significantly as more schools are found to be "in need of improvement." Much of the gap can be filled, however, by allowing states to allocate more of their federal dollars to supporting turnaround efforts in low-performing districts.
- No one—neither critics nor supporters of NCLB—really has any idea what it would cost to bring all students to proficiency by 2014 (or even 95 percent of all students, given the exceptions already built into the law), or if it can be done at all. The only question we can reasonably answer is whether there is enough money in the system to allow well-run schools to meet their goals for improvement.

From this perspective, school spending may, in some states or districts, be below what is required to steadily improve student achievement in line with federal requirements for "adequate yearly progress." However, the extent of the shortfall appears to be a small fraction of the figures put forth by NCLB's critics. Our calculations using a school improvement approach based on data from Massachusetts suggest a national gap of perhaps $8 billion a year, concentrated in a few states. This is only 5 to 10 percent of the critics' estimates, which are based on far more speculative and problematic models.

One of Several Mandates

In approaching these questions, it is crucial to remember that the federal government has a long-established interest in the operation of public schools and the academic achievement of students, dating back at least to the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Even before NCLB, most states had already committed themselves to a standards-based reform strategy. In some states, such as Texas and North Carolina, this was the result of internal pressures for reform. Other states were responding to the mandates of the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the predecessor to NCLB. Under the reauthorization, each state was supposed to develop comprehensive academic standards with curriculum-based tests that would be administered annually at three grade levels, in both reading and math. The problem was that these federal requirements lacked teeth. By the time the 1994 reauthorization was superseded by NCLB in 2002, only 21 states were in compliance with its accountability provisions. At its most basic level, NCLB attempts to fulfill the promise of earlier efforts by putting in place specific implementation timelines for those states that wish to continue to receive federal aid.

Even before No Child Left Behind, most states had already committed themselves to a standards-based reform strategy.

In addition, a wave of school finance lawsuits has placed half the states under court orders that effectively mandate comprehensive reforms and increased spending. The central claim in the latest, and most successful, of these lawsuits is that schools need a minimum amount of per-pupil funding in order to provide an "adequate" education. The plaintiffs in these lawsuits often draw on the same or similar reports that critics of NCLB use to make their case that a large funding shortfall exists related to NCLB's mandates.

Later in this essay we will demonstrate that these methods of determining the spending necessary for an adequate education suffer from severe shortcomings, and we will present an alternative approach that generates more credible numbers. For now the point is simply that much of what is alleged to be an NCLB mandate is either not new or actually results from states' actions. Most states have already dramatically increased their spending on education and have poured considerable resources into testing programs—changes driven by earlier federal initiatives, state-level policy, and court decisions, not NCLB. That NCLB raises the bar (and the stakes) is not in question. In assessing the burden of implementing the law, however, analysts must take care to focus on the fiscal impact of changes at the margin, instead of the total cost of education reform.

Student Assessment

Under the 1994 reauthorization, each state was supposed to put in place criterion-referenced tests to be administered annually at three grade levels, in both reading and math.

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By the 2005–06 school year, NCLB requires states to implement annual standards-based math and reading assessments in grades 3 through 8, plus at least one more round in grades 10 through 12. In addition, beginning in the 2007–08 school year, states must administer annual science tests at three grade levels (once each in grades 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12). In total, NCLB will require 17 tests per year, while the previous federal law required only six.

A number of states, however, had already committed themselves as a matter of law or policy to roll out many of these tests, with or without a federal mandate. Massachusetts, for example, has a statutory requirement to develop student assessments at three grade levels in five subject areas (English, math, history, science, and foreign languages). In addition, the commonwealth's board of education determined as a matter of policy to implement a somewhat broader assessment program, adding an extra year of testing in both English and math in 2001. Other states, such as California, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, North Carolina, and Texas, adopted assessment systems that exceeded the old federal requirement. Five states met the full NCLB testing mandate before it even went into effect.

A survey by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) reports that, on average, states will have to add eight or nine tests to their existing programs as a result of NCLB. This number probably overstates the added burden, however, since it includes tests that were required under the previous reauthorization but not implemented by the states. It is reasonable to assume that NCLB itself will actually account for fewer than half of the 17 tests it eventually requires.

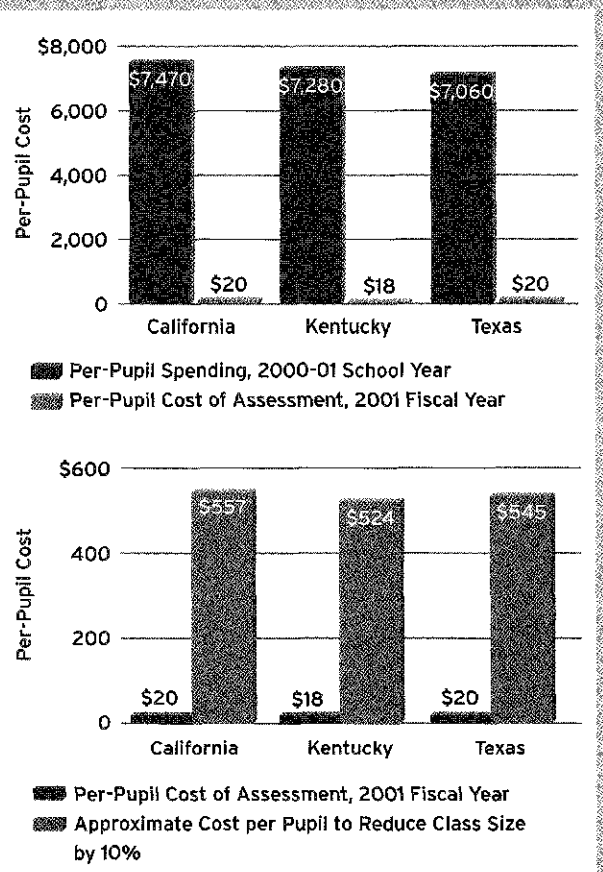
When fully implemented, the law's reading and math testing provisions will require states to administer approximately 45 to 50 million tests a year. The GAO's report estimates that the total cost to states of developing, administering, scoring, and reporting tests of the type currently administered would have been $442 million in fiscal year 2003, or roughly $9 per student tested.

Based on cost data from Massachusetts, we believe that the actual costs for tests of the quality necessary for an effective accountability program may run as much as twice the GAO's estimate. However, many states do not have all these tests in place for this school year. Moreover, many states have laws and policies requiring administration of such tests—with or without NCLB. All in all, it looks as if the incremental cost for implementing the new English and math tests soon to be required is about $400 million.

In short, the Department of Education's current level of appropriation for state assessments—$391 million—appears to be enough to cover the full marginal cost of federally mandated tests that states actually administered. This level of funding may not be sufficient going forward, however, as more states roll out the full complement of required tests and enrich the tests with more open-response questions.

Putting the Costs of Accountability in Perspective

In states like California, Kentucky, and Texas, whose accountability systems are among the most elaborate and expensive in the nation, the cost of testing each student amounts to less than 0.3 percent of per-pupil spending. Moreover, accountability programs are just a fraction of the cost of other popular school reforms, such as reducing class size.



Note: The total cost of assessment includes all expenses associated with the development and administration of state tests, the reporting of results, and the evaluation of programs.

SOURCE: Caroline M. Hoxby, "The Cost of Accountability," in *School Accountability* (Hoover Institution Press, 2002).

School Evaluation and Intervention

Besides measuring and tracking student achievement, NCLB requires districts and states to respond when schools

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The professional judgment model assumes that educators already know, instinctively, what resources are necessary to meet higher standards.

repeatedly fail to meet improvement expectations. Such intervention was also required under the previous federal law, but without the explicit requirements and timetables of NCLB. As a result, little outside intervention in underperforming schools has occurred.

Last year, under the NCLB rules, more than 8,600 schools around the country were listed as "in need of improvement" by state departments of education—less than 10 percent of all public schools in the country. As the "adequate yearly progress" aspect of the law results in increasingly heightened performance expectations, this number will probably rise, too, even though many schools will "graduate" off the list due to improving (or at least fluctuating) test scores.

Under NCLB rules, schools that fail to meet their adequate yearly progress targets are subject to an escalating series of interventions. The mandated roles for state departments of education in this process are scorekeeper—determining which schools and districts are missing their targets—and provider of technical assistance. Many states have enacted legislation that provides considerably greater authority for intervention, up to and including takeover powers in cases of persistent underperformance.

NCLB requires states to set aside about $230 million of their federal funds for grants to schools in need of improvement. Individual grants are supposed to be at least $50,000, with a ceiling of $500,000. Given 8,600 underachieving schools nationwide, however, the $230 million set-aside can support an average grant amount of only about $25,000, assuming each qualifying school receives a grant. As a practical matter, grants of this size will likely be focused on planning and professional development for staff.

The number of schools needing improvement under NCLB may increase substantially. In fact, this seems likely to occur once the requirement that all subgroups of students within a school make adequate yearly progress comes into effect. In this case, much more money will have to be appropriated or reallocated to school improvement grants in order to fund the minimum mandated interventions. If, for example, one-third of all schools found themselves "in need of improvement," then the minimum amount of federal support required to fund grants of $50,000 per school would be $1.6 billion.

Although the specific allocation for school improvement grants appears to fall well short of the minimum amount required by federal regulations, other sources of federal funds could more than close the gap, if they were directed to low-performing schools. For example, grants to states for "innovative programs" total more than $380 million. These resources, however, are allocated to districts on the basis of an enrollment-driven formula. Grants for improving teacher quality are much larger, exceeding $2.9 billion in 2003. Once again, these funds are allocated to districts by formula. Both of these grant programs provide relatively more money to districts with higher proportions of low-income students, which also tend to be lower-performing districts. Nevertheless, a more flexible allocation method would free up considerable resources to support the specific school improvement activities mandated under NCLB.

Rarely mentioned in the discussion of intervention programs is the cost of developing and sustaining a state evaluation infrastructure capable of conducting in-depth analysis and diagnosis of struggling schools and districts. Even with just 8,600 schools in need of improvement, it is not possible for state education agencies to develop and implement effective turnaround strategies, no matter how much money is available. Some form of triage must be used to identify those schools and districts most in need of help and least able to help themselves. Scanning the test results is not enough to determine which schools and districts require acute care and to prescribe the appropriate treatment. States must conduct in-depth evaluations of the facts on the ground, using a reliable protocol and experienced educators.

Massachusetts has been pioneering such a process for the past several years. To date, 18 schools have been declared underperforming, and each one has been required to develop an improvement plan, in collaboration with the state department of education, based on the findings of a diagnostic evaluation. A similar district-level procedure recently resulted in two districts' being identified as underperforming. The annual budget for this in-depth evaluation work is $2.4 million, and it is still in its launch phase. When fully implemented, the budget could easily double. Virtually none of these costs is covered by federal grants. If a similar evaluation infrastructure were put in place in every state, the total cost might reach $250 million a year.

The Cost of an "Adequate" Education

These discrete funding issues are important, but they pale in comparison with the claim that schools need to spend at least 20 to 35 percent more ($85 to $150 billion) to meet NCLB's performance goals. The source of this claim is a series of recent consultant reports commissioned by teacher unions, school board associations, legislative bodies, and others, often for use in school finance cases.

A fundamental problem with these reports is their tendency to rely on the outdated notion that education can be reduced to a simple production function between input and

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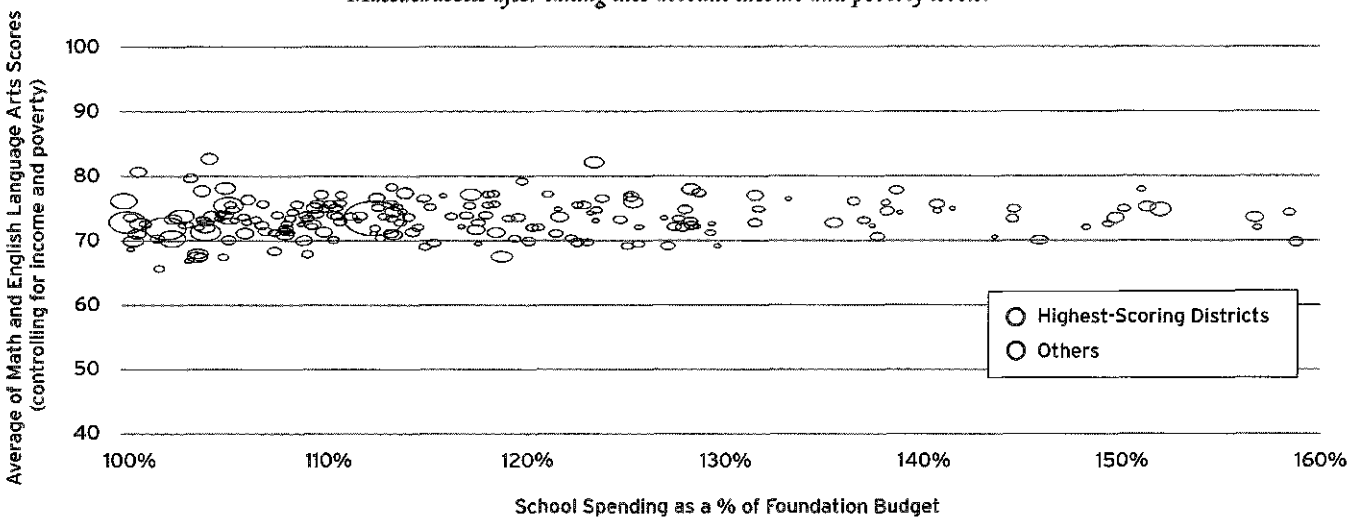
Spending vs. Performance (Figure 1)

No relationship between school districts' spending levels and their performance on standardized tests was observed in Massachusetts after taking into account income and poverty levels.



Note: Size of bubble is proportionate to district enrollment. Data are for all K-12 districts in Massachusetts during the 2001-02 school year. Test scores are adjusted based on a regression of the average of math and English language arts performance on median income, the percentage of students eligible for a reduced-price lunch, and spending.

SOURCE: Authors

output. Of course, the amount of spending can matter a great deal if it is raised from very low levels. But over the range of spending commonly observed among school systems in the United States, the effect on student achievement is often swamped by how wisely the money is spent, by bureaucratic and contract rigidities, and by a host of important policies and decisions that have nothing at all to do with money. The fact is that most research finds, after controlling for demographic factors, no consistent causal relationship between expenditures and achievement over the current range of spending levels.

Consider, for example, data from the school finance case currently being litigated in Massachusetts. The plaintiffs point out that high-performing districts often spend considerably in excess of the foundation budget, the state's measure of what is necessary to provide an adequate education. But the association between performance on state tests and spending as a percentage of the foundation budget—the plaintiffs' preferred measure of spending—vanishes after applying even the most rudimentary demographic controls (see Figure 1).

Nonetheless, the claims that schools are underfunded rest on models that purport to quantify the level of expenditure necessary to meet higher performance standards. Two approaches are used most frequently: the "professional judgment" and "successful schools" models. The professional judgment approach asks educators to build their ideal school budget from the bottom up, by answering questions such as: What is the optimal class size? How many teacher aides, computers, and professional development days should there be? Their instructions typically encourage them to "be creative and innovative," to create new programs or services, and to assume there are no revenue constraints. By contrast, the successful schools approach uses observed spending levels in the highest-performing schools as models from which to calculate necessary spending in other, lower-performing schools.

There are several methodological problems with the typical implementation of both of these approaches. The principal problem with the professional judgment model—the model drawn on most heavily by Mathis—is that there is no attempt to tie observed spending levels to actual student outcomes. It assumes that educators already know, instinctively or by dint of personal experience, what resources are necessary to meet higher standards, so the analysis of data is considered superfluous. This raises questions of possible subjectivity.

Take the Massachusetts case, for example. The plaintiffs' professional judgment study, performed by University of Virginia professor Deborah Verstegen, relied on employees of the school systems where the plaintiff students are enrolled to determine the ideal level of school spending. Verstegen's panelists included the superintendents of seven plaintiff districts. As the judge pointed out, one of the panelists was the mother of the named plaintiff in the original 1993 case. The study's findings implied that almost every district in the state—even the wealthiest—was underfunded,

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with an average shortfall of 66 percent. Ironically, the only sizable district judged to be spending enough was Cambridge, where student performance has been persistently low.

If the increase in federal spending does not fully cover the fiscal gap, it comes pretty close.

While in the past there may have been few alternatives to the professional judgment model's input-based approach, today it seems out of step with the spirit of standards-based reform. The successful schools approach, to its credit, does focus on measured performance in a standards-based system. However, in practice, the approach is typically flawed by its method for selecting high-performing schools. As has been long established, family background is the strongest predictor of academic success. Children from wealthier, better-educated families also tend to live in communities where property-tax revenues and school budgets are high. The successful schools model typically assumes that a school's high test scores are primarily a function of its budget, rather than a student's family background. As a result, high-spending schools may be identified as "successful," not because they add more educational value, but because they enroll children from high-income families. The red bubbles in Figure 1, which indicate the districts identified as successful by the plaintiffs in the Massachusetts litigation, illustrate a concrete example.

As typically applied, the successful schools approach also has a number of technical flaws. Most important is its use of *average* spending among high-performing schools as the *minimum* level necessary for fiscal adequacy. By using this method, half or more of the successful schools themselves are inevitably found to have insufficient funding to be successful. While it may be true in Lake Wobegon that all districts can be at or above average, the laws of mathematics rule that out for the rest of us.

In Massachusetts, the plaintiffs commissioned a successful schools study by John Myers. Myers selected the top 75 districts and estimated their average level of per-pupil expenditures for regular education students. Because the selection criterion was the level of state test scores (with no attempt to gauge value added), the 75 districts were disproportionately high income—with incomes 50 percent above the state average—and the share of their students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches was only 4 percent, compared with 24 percent statewide. Myers' practice of using the average spending from this high-spending group (as well as some other flawed procedures) implied that 90 percent of Massachusetts students are in under-funded districts, including 70 percent of those in the "successful" districts. On average, Massachusetts spending was judged to be 20 percent too low.

The studies used to claim that NCLB requires a 20 to 35 percent increase in school funding are similar to those brought to court in Massachusetts. Many are by the same author. Lacking scientific grounding, they are too flawed and too sensitive to changes in assumptions to sustain a compelling critique.

Improvement Model

Although any approach to calculating fiscal adequacy is bound to have limitations and flaws, state laws and courts increasingly require that some rational method be developed to approximate the price of an adequate education. Given that mandate, we suggest an "improvement" version of the successful schools approach, based at least in part on the rate of growth in measured academic achievement rather than a simple snapshot of average performance. This is not a full-blown value-added model, which would track gains in individual student performance from one year to the next. But it at least roughly controls for a district's previous performance, rather than effectively selecting districts with favorable demographics.

The improvement approach would first identify a set of K–12 districts that have realized the greatest gains in measured student achievement over a multi-year period. The next step is to identify a spending level somewhat lower than the group average to capture the minimum necessary expenditure as demonstrated by successful districts. In identifying that level, one should keep in mind that some of the lowest spending districts may be outliers whose success would be difficult to replicate. In general, one to two standard deviations below the average among improving districts might be a reasonable benchmark.

Let's again use Massachusetts as an example to see how this might work in practice. With the state's index for determining overall progress across grades and subjects as the criterion, 183 of the state's 207 K–12 districts met their adequate yearly progress targets in 2001–02. Among these districts, 114 also achieved a performance rating of at least "moderate" in both English and math. Of these districts, 46 had improvement rates that were above average. These two sets of improving districts (114 and 46) are still above average in terms of income, but less so than the set of K–12 districts selected by Myers solely on the basis of their performance levels. Incomes in the groups of 114 and 46 districts are 26 percent and 8 percent, respectively, above the state average, while Myers' districts were 50 percent above the average.

The average per-pupil spending figures for these two sets of improving districts were $7,499 and $7,105, respectively, in 2001–02 (compared with $7,840 for all K–12 dis-

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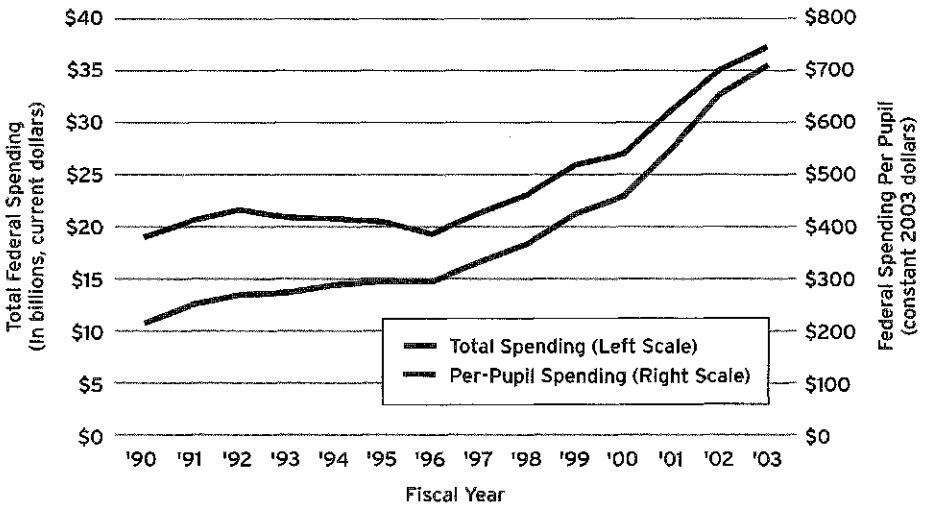
tricts). One standard deviation below the mean of the improving districts was $6,320 and $6,354. This would imply that the necessary spending level for adequate progress is approximately 80 percent of the K–12 average spending level in Massachusetts. By contrast, the necessary spending levels implied by the plaintiff models discussed above, which are similar to the models used by NCLB's critics, were well above the average spending level.

Whether districts can continue to meet their adequate yearly progress targets with the current level of spending, right on through NCLB's ambitious goals for 2014, remains to be seen. It will demand close monitoring at both the state and federal levels. But for now, it would appear that spending in Massachusetts is adequate to achieve the NCLB student achievement mandate.

Increasing Its Share (Figure 2)

Federal aid to K–12 education has continued to grow since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act.



Note: Spending data include all U.S. Department of Education spending for K-12 education.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education

The National Picture

To illustrate what this analysis might mean nationally, consider *Education Week*'s calculation of spending per student, adjusted (albeit imperfectly) for regional cost differences. By *Education Week*'s measure, only 11 states have average spending levels below our benchmark for adequacy (in other words, 80 percent of Massachusetts' per-pupil average). For each of these states, a total fiscal gap can be estimated by multiplying the per-pupil gap by enrollment. Adding these up for the 11 states results in an estimated national fiscal gap of approximately $8 billion (almost half of which is in California). While this $8 billion estimate is not trivial, it is only 5 to 10 percent of the projections claimed by the law's critics.

To be sure, this estimate carries with it certain caveats. For example, if a state's average per pupil spending exceeds the adequacy measure, but some of its districts do not, the estimated fiscal gap of zero for that state assumes it will redistribute some of its spending. Progress in Massachusetts is also no doubt attributable in part to the state's strong system of student accountability, including a universal graduation requirement pegged to the 10th grade statewide test—a provision missing from the NCLB mandate. Other states that spend at levels similar to those in Massachusetts, but without student accountability, may fall short of NCLB goals.

Although NCLB's critics charge that Washington has not been doing its fair share, especially when compared with the original spending plan authorized by the act, total federal Department of Education appropriations for K–12 education grew by more than 25 percent—almost $8 billion—from 2001 to 2003, despite a sharp drop in federal revenues (see Figure 2). Title I appropriations alone grew by more than $2.9 billion over the same period—a 33 percent increase—and as of this writing are set to grow another $0.7 billion in fiscal year 2004, for a total of a 41 percent increase since NCLB's enactment.

If this spending increase does not fully cover the fiscal gap, it would appear to come pretty close—especially when combined with state-level spending increases already required under various state laws and court decisions. Given that many states have been slow to implement the statewide assessment and accountability systems required by NCLB, one might even argue that in some instances federal spending growth has overshot the target.

–James Peyser is chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Education. Robert Costrell is a professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (on leave) and currently serves as chief economist in the Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance. Peyser is a named defendant in the Massachusetts school finance case, and both Peyser and Costrell testified for the defense. An unabridged version of this article is available at www.educationnext.org.

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School politics can be just as treacherous in a small town as in a big city, as the author discovered after moving from New York City to the town of Hudson (pop. 8,000) and found himself trying to reform the local public school district.

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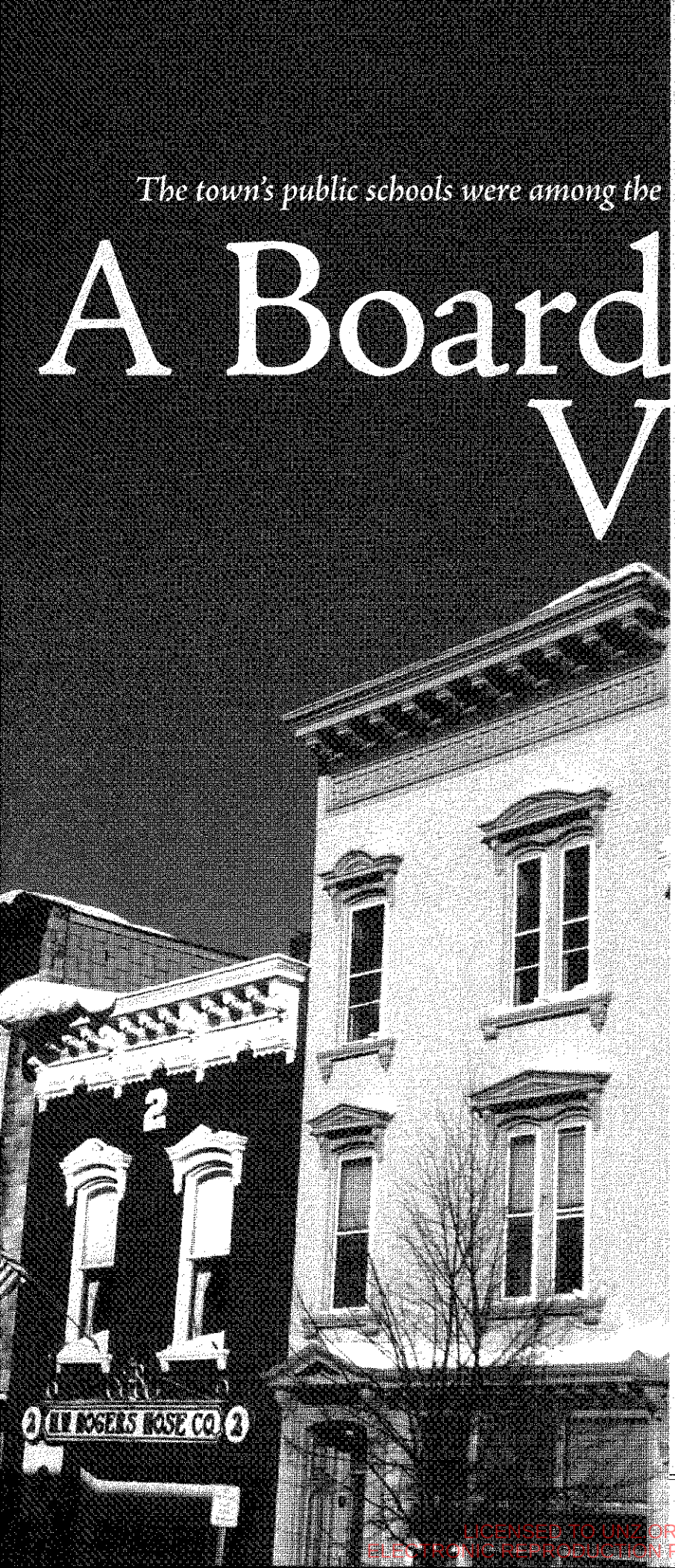
The town's public schools were among the worst. Yet no one seemed to care.

A Board's Eye VIEW



During the last weeks of my brief tenure as a member of the local public school board, I took to carrying around a copy of the Declaration of Independence. I felt a need to commune with ancestors who had suffered a "long train of abuses"—and done something about it. Only six months into my five-year term on the board, I was frustrated and angry. The town had been unresponsive to the stunning failures of the local school district—nearly two-thirds of our 4th graders couldn't pass a mediocre state reading test—and continued to show not even a pulse of concern. Not that everyone was happy with the way things were, but those few were resigned, or unaware, or simply afraid to speak up. I did speak up, and I will long remember the growling response of a teacher in my son's school: "How dare you show your face here!" Or a fellow school board member's laughing, "Pete, why do you say those things? Don't you know they have your kid?" It really did feel like a hostage situation. But what was I saying? That the system needed fixing. In this small town, however, that was like a stick in the eye. "Changing a school system," an educator friend reminded me, "is like moving a graveyard. You're not going to get any help from the inside."

My colleagues on the board were in their working prime, with jobs that held retirement potential and deep ties to the community. Not a group of boat-rockers. Dave owned a local

by PETER MEYER

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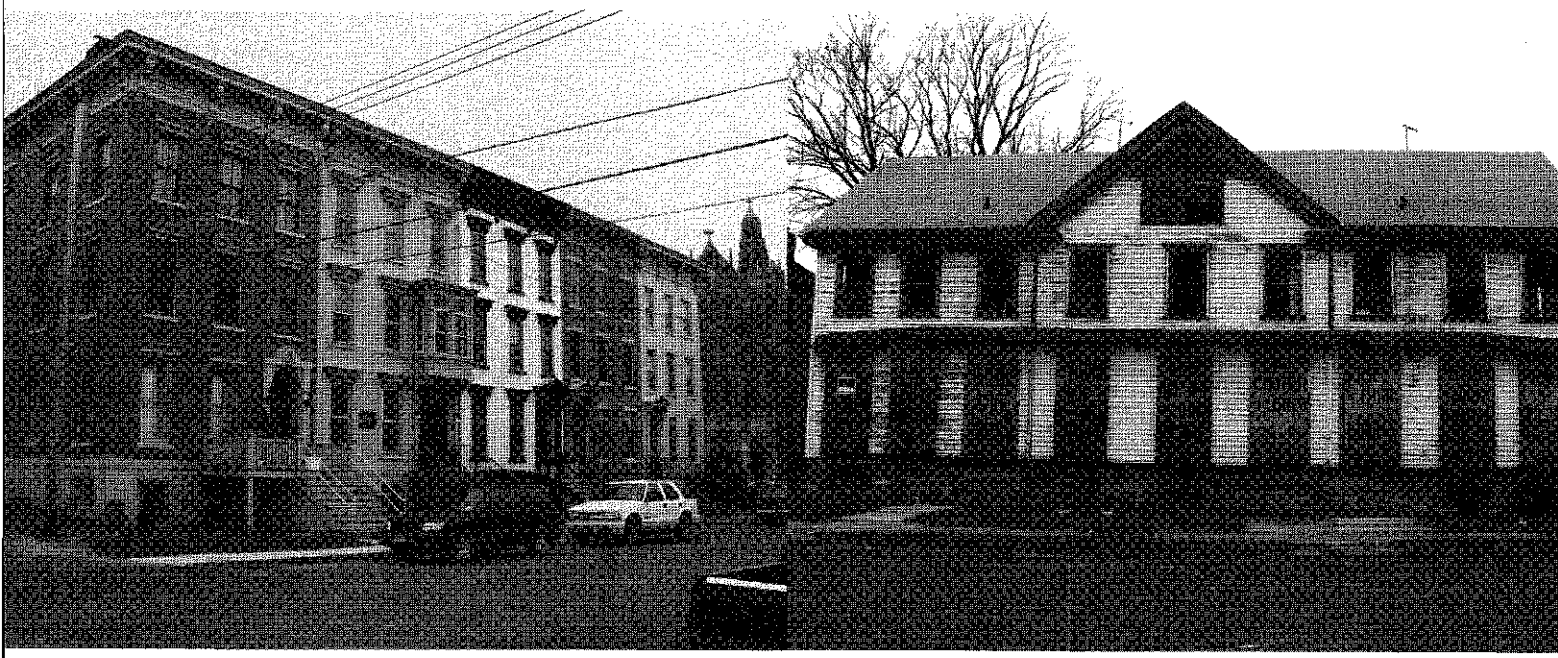

Though the old town had been rediscovered by émigrés from New York City, few of the new arrivals had children. Thus, the economic renaissance had little impact on the local schools—except as a new source of revenue.

catering and tent business; Todd was an investigator for Social Services; Ed, a computer systems analyst for the state government; Jim, a banker; Frank, our town librarian; Cathy, a popular former kindergarten teacher. Most were either born in the area or had lived there for decades. Each one had kids who had either just graduated or were still in the district schools; Jim and Frank had wives who were teachers in the district. I was a freelance journalist and suddenly felt as if I had gotten off a plane in the wrong country. What was I doing here?

Here is a public school district of 2,400 kids and several hundred support staff located 120 miles north of Manhattan. It is nestled between the picturesque Berkshires and the ancient Catskills, on the banks of the Hudson River, a district cobbled together from several small towns and villages in a county of rolling hills and old dairy farms, centered in the old river town of Hudson (pop. 8,000). Once on the short list of candidates for New York state capital, Hudson had been a whale oil processing center whose docks once saw the coming and going of dozens of ships every week. Alexander Hamilton, in his last case, had defended a Hudson publisher against libel charges. Martin van Buren practiced law on its Main Street. The lush landscapes had inspired the painter Frederic Church as well as the writer Washington Irving. My wife and I had fallen in love with all of it, including the old houses, one of which we bought in the late 1980s, dreaming of a time when we could move there to live the simple life.

And so we did, in 1997, with a five-year-old son in tow. Almost immediately we saw a different town. Behind the luxuriant views and *This Old House* corbels was a crumbling social infrastructure. The town's population had actually declined over the last 40 years. The once-bustling shipbuilding factories, river docks, brick-making yards, and cement plants had disappeared. The proud mansions, sturdy brownstones, and energetic Victorians that we loved were mere reminders of a once-prospering local economy. Social services and corrections were now among the town's largest industries. A quarter of the residents lived below the poverty line, while less than 10 percent held a college degree. In search of Currier & Ives, we had stumbled into a place of ancient feuds and crusty habits sculpted by the physics of poverty, a place of too many rusty teeth and too few books. The struggling public library was quartered in an 18th-century stone building that had been, in the course of its 185 years, an almshouse, an orphanage, and an insane asylum.

Much to our horror, Hudson was also a place of lousy schools. The economic and demographic changes that had depleted the town coincided with educational trends of consolidation and busing. Hudson's vibrant neighborhood elementary schools had been closed—as had smaller schools in outlying communities—and the students in the enlarged district were put into four remaining buildings; one housed grades 1 and 2; another, grades 3 and 4; another, grades 5 through 8; and the high school incorporated grades 9 through 12. There was thus little geographic or cultural homogeneity—and no heart. In fact, with administrative offices located several miles from the nearest school, the district felt like a kind of colonial outpost: most teachers did not live in town and less than half lived in the district. The superintendent did not even live in the state. As I soon learned, the Hudson City

The Hudson school district was a kind of colonial outpost: most teachers

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School District was classified as "high needs/rural" by the New York State Education Department; more than 50 percent of the 2,400 kids qualified for the federal free/reduced-price lunch program. At first we looked elsewhere for a school for our son, but the better private ones—where many of the town's tiny group of professional and upper-class parents sent their children— were pricey and an hour's drive away. After several weeks of canvassing the region, we found ourselves walking—this was a big plus—toward John L. Edwards Elementary School, just four blocks from our house. The school had 600 kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd graders—all of them adorable. How bad could it be? Besides, the principal, a middle-aged woman with a dour demeanor and a cluttered office, knew who E.D. Hirsch was.

The Responsive Classroom

It had become something of a ritual, like ordering fettucine alfredo at a new Italian restaurant as a test of the place's *métier*. "What do you think of E.D. Hirsch?" My wife was tired of the question, but I persisted in asking teachers and administrators as we visited potential schools for our son. Though Hirsch's Core Knowledge program had become one of the principal tributaries in the current of school reform, few of the educators we met in our school search had even heard of him, let alone read his 1987 bestseller, *Cultural Literacy*. I was so discouraged that by the time we got to Carol G., principal of Edwards Elementary, my question had been modified to, "Have you heard of E.D. Hirsch?" When she said Yes, I was ecstatic. We signed Dylan up, hopeful, or perhaps looking for any excuse not to put a six-year-old on a bus for 45 minutes every morning and afternoon.

All seemed well until, several weeks into the school year, I went to my first parents meeting. I found myself sitting in a circle of some 20 parents answering questions posed by a "facilitator" trained in something called "the responsive classroom." According to the sunshiny leader, the key to academic success was good social interaction; she talked about "shared feelings" instead of what Hirsch called "shared knowledge." Toward the end of the hour she asked the group, "And what do you want your child to know by the end of this school year?" Around the circle we went, each person saying that she (all of the other parents there were mothers) wanted her son or daughter to "be a better person" or to "get along with other children" or to "know right from wrong." This was "very good," said the facilitator, "very good." But I was perplexed. When my turn came, I said, "I would like my son to know the names of the countries of Africa." There was laughter. They thought I was joking.

In fact, the joke was on me. Public school, as I was soon to learn, was more sociological hothouse than academic incubator, choc-a-bloc with experiments in self-esteem and "skill sets" and dogma about when children were "ready to learn." For instance, the responsive classroom, though its developers claimed to care about academics, was all about "sharing, listening, inclusion and participation," about teaching the "skills needed to be a responsive member of a classroom and school." When I asked a teacher why 1st graders weren't learning any history, beyond holiday fare, she said, matter-of-factly, "I can't teach history. I'm too busy teaching children how to read."

"Why can't children learn the names of the planets in the solar system?" I asked Principal Carol.

"Because," she said, "they wouldn't know what it means. They can't grasp concepts like gravity and rotation on an axis."

I suddenly realized that I had failed to ask the sulky principal the follow-up question about Hirsch: what she thought of him. She told me now. "Oh him," she scoffed. "That rote memorization guy." My heart sank. It was not just an oversight that 1st graders would not learn the names of the countries of Africa or, for that matter, the names of the continents. It was planned. I started asking every teacher and administrator I met about curriculum and found a teacher corps almost universally scornful of content.

Running for Office

Strangely, I thought, there was no uproar about the school district's dismal academic record. But when I investigated, I found that it had been that way for years; evidently, everyone was used to being at the bottom of the academic barrel, numbed to low test scores and high failure rates—or had gotten out. According to one report, of the 676 school districts in the state outside of New York City, only 34 scored worse than Hudson on the statewide 4th-grade English language arts test. Even among the 160 high needs/rural districts, Hudson ranked 151st.

But while I saw the lives of children being wasted, the people who counted (the infamous "establishment") saw it as an extracurricular problem. At a PTA meeting, several mothers glared at me when I raised the question of the district's doing a better job. "Our schools have plenty of opportunities for kids," one scolded. "All you have to do is ask for them. It's here. If you're failing tests, it's not the district's problem."

did not live in town and less than half lived in the district.

It was then I decided that change could only come from the top: the school board.

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My "Campaign for Kids"—there were three of us competing for two five-year slots on the board—consisted of a press release announcing my candidacy, a flyer (that I pinned up at supermarkets), and palm cards (handed out to anyone I met). My son Dylan, finishing 1st grade, drew evocative pictures to illustrate my ABC's pledge of "Art, Beauty, and Community," while my wife collected brochures for private schools—she thought I was crazy.

With 523 votes, I finished second and became an elected official, a member of the school board.

At first, I dismissed as unenlightened the warning of outgoing board member Pat Sullivan—"You can't have an agenda in this job." After all, what was wrong with wanting a challenging curriculum or administrative competence? But as I would later learn, it was not *what* you wanted, but how badly. The warning signs were all around, even at my very first board meeting—the "reorganizational" meeting, so called because it marked the official beginning of a school year (July 1), when the new budget clock began ticking.

There were 15 or so people in the audience of the small, windowless cafeteria of the high school. They applauded after Frank and I took our loyalty oaths. I felt the patriotic pulse, the line to Washington and Jefferson, in this democratic ritual, but the flash of nationalist pride was not quite bright enough to blind me to the fact that we were reorganizing almost nothing.

The items for board action, printed out in a 100-page spiral-bound agenda book, came fast and furious as Ed, the board president, went down the list, reading each item, waiting for a motion, then a second, then a vote. In quick succession, without comment or question, we approved the "official depositories" for the district's monies (it was a $28 million budget), approved "single signature checks," the "system of Treasurer's Receipts," "an annual audit," a "system of borrowing to meet fiscal responsibilities." Assured in advance that this was all pro-forma, and determined as I was to get off on a good start by being a team player, I voted Aye on everything. Twelve votes in just as many minutes and every one was Ayes-5 and Nays-0. (Two members of the board were missing on this memorable night.)

Then came the "appointments." Substitute Teacher Caller. Substitute Teacher Aide Caller. Supervising Dentist. Asbestos Designee. Mileage Reimbursement Rate Delivery Service. Aye. Aye. Aye. Aye. We approved the Tax Warrant, the appointment of the high-school Weight Room Supervisor and the substitute Supervisor. We appointed 15 summer school aides. We voted to give the Superintendent of Building & Grounds a salary increase to $45,000 (from what I didn't know and didn't ask). Then we voted to give the Clerk, the Treasurer, the School Lunch Manager, the Transportation Coordinator, two school nurses, and the Abstinence Only Coordinator 4.5 percent salary increases. (I seconded that motion, having no idea who most of the people were, what they did, or what their previous pay was.) Ayes-5, Nays-0. We went through 25 votes in less than an hour, all of them unanimous.

We then voted to go into Executive Session and moved to an adjoining conference room to discuss "a contractual issue," one of the few allowable reasons for excluding the public from deliberations (though I would soon learn that Executive Sessions were where most of the real business of the board got done). Tonight, I quickly learned, the issue was the superintendent's contract. And we discussed it with him in the room. Well, "discuss" was not quite what happened. The contract was not even produced and, after a few softball questions, we agreed on a two-year extension, with a $3,000 increase to his $97,029 contract. Over a hundred grand. I was dumbfounded. How could anyone be making that much money overseeing a school district where a third of the 3rd graders couldn't read?

By the time we emerged from Executive Session to vote on the contract "in public," it was after ten o'clock and the public had gone home. Not surprisingly, since the two reporters had also left, there was no mention in the next day's paper of the superintendent's contract renewal. In fact, there never was.

These were the kind of catchall special-education categories that allowed a

Legalese

These first meetings dimmed any notion that I was joining a hallowed democratic institution—a forum for airing and discussing the community's concerns. I had become a mere cog in a machine. Among the most oddly numbing of our tasks on the board was that of reading and approving policies. "We are taking policy action," said the superintendent, Don C., a tall, affable Texan who favored starched shirts and took courses at Harvard. He could, as a veteran teacher friend of mine pointed out, "manage the board with the finesse of an expert magician." Smiling, he announced the district's need to establish rules on sexual harassment. I didn't know it was a problem. But, said the Super, the Supreme Court had ruled on "peer sex harassment," and we had "to take action." And so, at one meeting, we were treated to the "first reading" on policies about "Sexual Harassment of Students," "Sexual Harassment of Students Regulation," "Sexual Harassment Formal Complaint Form," "Sexual Harassment Appeal Form." There was even—though this was obviously caused by a by-then bug-eyed typist—a "Sexual Harassment of Formal Com-

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plaint Form," which seemed an appropriate slip. "Mandates" and laws sprouted acres of explanatory weeds—most of them unnecessary. No one ever read the original "mandate."

For instance, no one seemed to know why the "Parent/Family/Community Involvement Policy" was necessary, but it was assumed that it was required by some Oz-like authority, passed through the policy-writing machinery at some school board association office, and sent to us for our "approval." I looked through three pages of well-intentioned euphemism—"Parent and family involvement is not a set of activities," it read. "It is an individual and social process that empowers parents and students and builds their leadership skills in order for true partnerships to develop between homes and schools"—and wondered, Why? No one else on the board expressed any hint of having read it. And I was beginning to discern a pattern: the more written, the less understood.

Finally, sandwiched between the sex and the parental involvement, I noticed a "Code of Conduct for School Board Members." This was intended, wrote the superintendent, in recommending the code, "to set standards for how the Board interacts with itself." Sounded like sex to me. But the preoccupation with board member behavior was the result of the long-standing tension between the democracy represented by elected officials who oversaw the schools and the professionalism of those hired to run them. The superintendent was definitely attempting to tip the balance in favor of the pros. "We will not attempt to exercise individual authority over the district's operations, staff, or personnel decisions," read one of the rules he was proposing for us. Another: "We will not express individual judgments about the performance of the superintendent or staff. . . . We recognize the value of the chain of command. When approached by staff, constituents or the public, we will channel all inquiries to the administrator." I e-mailed the superintendent, "Is this a joke?" He called and laughed lamely.

Jobs Program

For some reason the board was asked to vote on every individual hire, no matter how small. In one meeting, we approved a slew of appointments—a psychologist for $36,950, a social studies teacher for $30,791, a guidance counselor for $30,790—without discussion. At another we spent 30 minutes arguing about whether to raise the pay of the student lifeguards by ten cents an hour. It seemed that the prime function of the school system was to create jobs. Beyond all else, the school district was the area's most proficient employment agency.

This became even more apparent to me when the district had two school principal vacancies to fill. I knew these positions could be key to serious curriculum change, and I e-mailed Don, "I am very excited about the possibility of personnel changes and would like to jump immediately into recruitment mode." I suggested going "nationwide" with the search, and he encouraged my enthusiasms. But when I volunteered to put the word out, Ed, the board president, wrote back, "How about sending out the copy of our announcement? . . . It's no telling where mail from you will travel and coming from a Board member I believe we should limit the editorializing of any positions we solicit for." I laughed to myself. But then I got to the last sentence and wondered if it was time to cry. "We should let people know we are looking for quality, of course, but not to the point of advertising outside official channels."

Then, I got my first taste of local politics, as I witnessed Ed and Don work the system so that we hired two local men, both of whom had been with the district for decades

district to dispose of many problem children with expensive babysitting.

John L. Edwards Elementary was built in the late 1960s to be one of Hudson's "modern" schools, housing grades 1 through 8. Consolidation has made it the home of 600 1st and 2nd graders, ensuring that no child is there long enough for a parent to become vested in the school's future.

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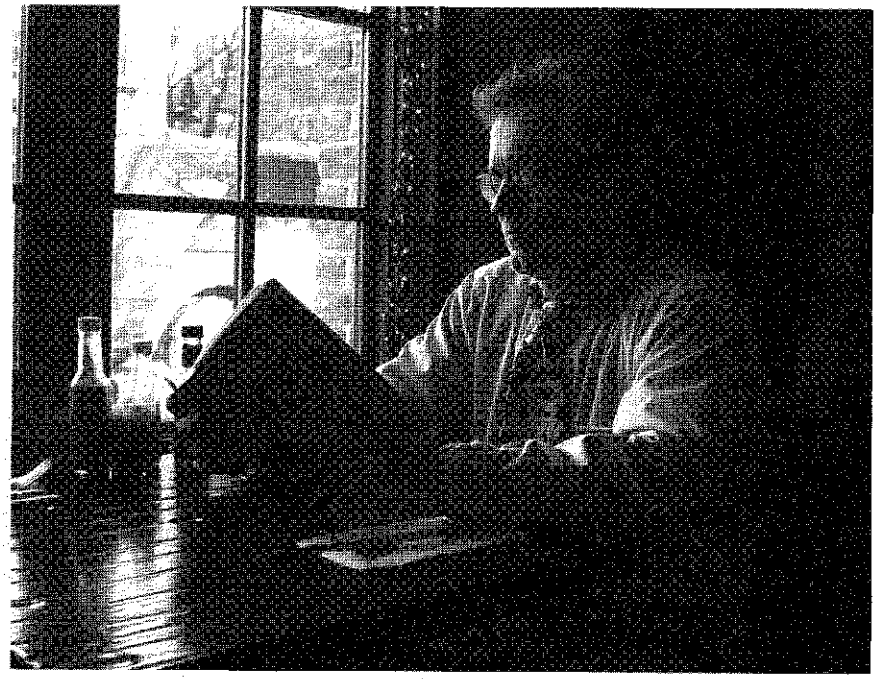

Few of the educators whom the author met during the search for a school for his child had even heard of E.D. Hirsch, let alone read his 1987 bestseller, Cultural Literacy.

(earning $80,000 a year—not bad in a county where you could pick up a nice four-bedroom house for the same amount). I now realized that this was going to be hard. Maybe nobody cared about curriculum, but they did care—a lot—about jobs.

Meanwhile, the board never reviewed other major expenditures, such as the installation of a new computer system. Another time, I asked the superintendent how a new asphalt parking lot was installed at the Greenport School without board approval—or even a bid or a notice or a need. He informed me that a bid wasn't necessary for a job worth less than $10,000. And how much had this cost? About $9,950, he said with a straight face. I mentioned this to a local doctor, a Hudson native, and he laughed. "Around here you can buy someone with a $12 lunch."

Not So Special Education

In another meeting, we approved a recommendation for a student to "attend programs for the 1999–2000 school year." I looked at the accompanying form and saw that we were talking about student #058-99, a 12th grader born in 1981 who was classified as "learning disabled." He/she would be assigned to a "resource room." There were other abbreviations and codes—SP, PT, OT, SW, VI—and mention of "Counseling: 1x30," but no clarification of what any of this meant—or cost. Don't ask. "Mandated" was the knowing word from veteran board members.

In this sense, special education provided the best example of the democratic fiction that the school board had become. Despite the laudable goal of breaking down barriers to education for disabled children, in Hudson special ed had grown into a gurgling brook of angled execution and wasteful spending. Children were designated disabled by a District Committee on Special Education, a group of about a dozen social service and education professionals and some "ordinary" people chosen by the superintendent and the director of special education. It was up to the committee to determine the difference between disabled and nondisabled students and then make decisions about what kind of services disabled students needed.

When I saw the thick Annual Report about Hudson's program, I gasped: almost 16 percent of the children in the school district were disabled, almost double the national average. But when I saw the distribution of the children among the 13 categories of disability, I got the picture. Of 394 disabled children, three were autistic, ten were mentally retarded, four were hard of hearing, two had traumatic brain injuries, ten were orthopedically impaired, and ten more were multiply disabled. The rest, more than 350, were either "emotionally disturbed," "learning disabled," or "speech impaired." These were the kind of catchall categories that allowed a district to dispose of many problem children—in Hudson those children were mostly black—with expensive baby-sitting.

During a school tour the superintendent gave me in my second month on the board, he directed me into the library of Edwards Elementary and introduced me to a young teacher standing in front of an easel on which she had written "self esteem." At her feet, sprawled on beanbag cushions, were four black children in special education, looking extremely bored. The teacher blinked a lot, smiled nervously, and kept urging the prone children to "sit up straight." They giggled.

As we left the room, I turned to the superintendent, angry, and said, "I know those kids and they have more self-esteem in their little finger than . . ."

He waved his hand. "We have a problem with that teacher," he whispered. "That lady didn't turn in grades for her class from last semester." He paused. "We think she might have a drug problem. I had to transfer her to special ed."

"Trouble with the *teacher*?" I almost shouted. Now, even more perturbed. "An adult with drug problems is teaching self-esteem?"

"Nothing we can do," he said. "The union is grieving her transfer."

It should have been the district's motto: Nothing We Can Do.

In the Red

We were meeting in a small room of the high school, behind

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the principal's office. I wasn't sure whether this was an "official" meeting, and thus "public," or an unofficial meeting—and thus illegal. Or both. We were being called together, said the board president, to go over the auditor's report for the year. He introduced Ray, a middle-aged man in a dark suit who handed out a three-page letter. Everyone read.

It didn't take long to figure out that something was wrong with the district's finances. We had a deficit—one that had grown from $468,919 to $749,434—reported Ray, caused by "unrealized state aid and overspending of the voter-approved budget." Not only that, he wrote, "It should be noted that there are no provisions in the law or regulations which permit a school district to have a deficit fund balance."

I was baffled by the apparent lack of urgency surrounding the news that the law didn't allow for deficit spending. After a few questions, Ray was thanked and dismissed. And before we adjourned, Ed reminded everyone about the state school board conference in Syracuse the following month. My mouth dropped. How could we trundle off to a weekend conference at taxpayer expense after just being told we had an illegal budget deficit? "It's already been paid for," said Ed.

My bafflement turned to horror over the next several months as I learned that the district had been running a deficit for several years. In fact, the state comptroller's office, which oversees the fiscal integrity of all state and local government agencies, had conducted its own audit and found the same thing: "overexpenditure of budgetary appropriations and the overestimation of revenues." Money was being moved around, from one fund to another, which was also against the rules, the comptroller noted. And when auditors had asked for records, they couldn't be found. Why hadn't this been a major scandal when the report had first been issued? Why hadn't heads rolled? I recall bringing the comptroller's audit to a PTA meeting, holding it up for all to see, and suggesting that many tens of thousands of dollars were being wasted while the PTA was asked to buy dictionaries for the kids. There were a dozen people, including two school principals, in the room, the small library of the Greenport Elementary School. No one said anything. "Isn't anyone interested in even seeing this?" I asked.

"Oh that," said one mother finally. "That's just politics."

Charter School Hysteria

The worst of the politics was still to come, however, as the multiple dysfunctions seemed to coalesce around the question of charter schools. My attempts to get district personnel to see a charter school as a natural response to a troubled system were fruitless. Even after the letter from the state department of education informing us "that the Board of Regents has received an application for a charter school located within your school district boundaries," no one wanted to talk about it. They were going to take care of it the old-fashioned way: silence and intimidation.

The web of connections that kept the money flowing through the veins of this tiny community was the same intricate one that inured it to academic failure

Instead of prompting discussion of the issues that made a charter viable—low test scores, high dropout rates, and a litany of woes that would mark the district as "failing"—the opposite happened. The teacher union president, normally a regular presence at school board meetings, stopped coming so that he wouldn't have to answer my questions about what was being done to *improve* things that his teachers controlled. (He had already stopped responding to my phone calls and letters.) He then wrote a letter to the newspaper in which he attacked the charter for "draining" resources from the public school, a clear message that the charter insurgents (mostly black) would take away jobs; fighting words, especially in this small, economically blighted community. I complained to Ed and Don about these tactics, but they shrugged and said, "Nothing we can do." I asked again that the charter school be put on our agenda. "Later," said Ed, obviously waiting for the jobs' threat poison to spread. When they did not respond to my request to write a letter to the editor (normally, a very big deal), I knew matters had become bareknuckled. And when my letter did appear, pointing out that the charter movement was what a failing public school system had created, Ed e-mailed me, calling me "a disgrace" and accusing me of "disrespect for staff (at all levels), administration, parents, and the general public."

I then realized that the debate was as much cultural—and racial—as educational, that the web of connections that kept the money flowing through the veins of this tiny community was the same intricate one that inured it to academic failure.

On Valentine's Day, 2000, as my public battle in the paper percolated into board meetings, I walked into an Executive Session and was greeted with scowls from fellow board members. Jim the banker called me a "loose cannon"—and I took it as a compliment. But I knew it was time to throw in the towel. This would be a long war, and the school board was not where the biggest battles would be won or lost.

–Peter Meyer is a freelance journalist whose work has appeared in Harper's, Time, *and* Life *magazines. He continues to be active in local school reform.*

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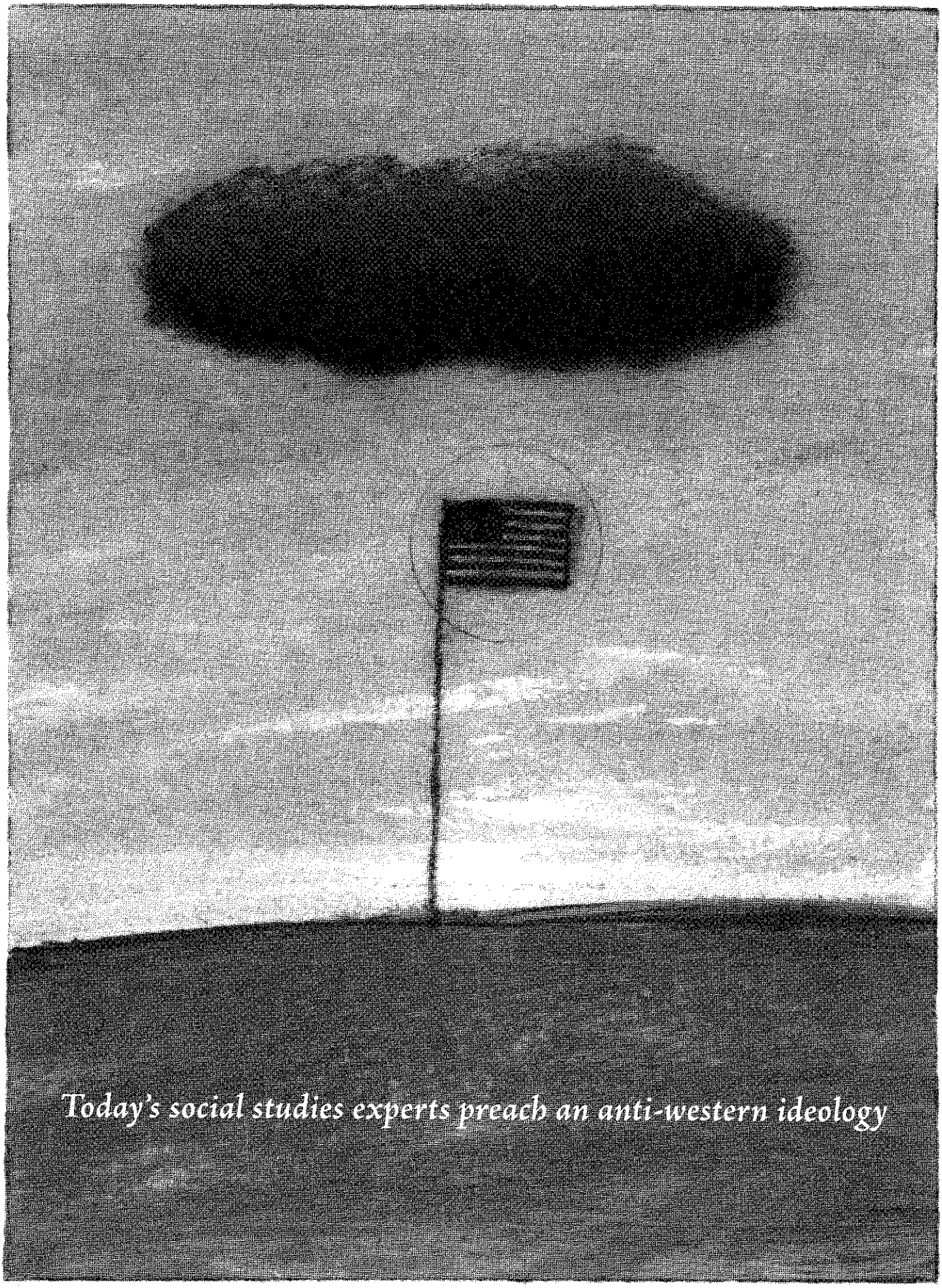

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the sun sets on the West

by JONATHAN BURACK

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon led to a revival of patriotic feelings across the nation. Yet the mood was quite different among prominent experts within the social studies field. In the pages of *Social Education* (the premier journal of the National Council for the Social Studies) and in rapidly assembled curriculum supplements, a clear effort was made to temper any hint of patriotic excess in the classroom and to stress instead the need for therapeutic healing. The concern for children who may have been traumatized by the televised carnage was of course laudable and necessary, as was the insistence that students be urged to show tolerance toward their Muslim and Arab neighbors. The trouble was that the overwhelming emphasis on these themes crowded out efforts to teach students anything of political or historical relevance.

Moreover, the history curricula promoted by social studies experts insisted that teachers ought to encourage their students to look more critically at U.S. policy in the Middle East in the hopes of understanding the terrorists' motives. This focus shocked many Americans, as was clear from the bad press the National Education Association, the nation's largest teacher union, received when some of the curricula posted on its website suggested that teachers avoid attributing blame for the attacks—despite the fact that the attacks were a clear product of a well-organized terrorist group. Yet anyone aware of the global education ideology, which has captivated social studies experts ever since the end of the cold war, was not surprised. This ideology is deeply suspicious of America's institutions, values, and role in the world, while celebrating other nations and cultures without a hint of skepticism. (Of course, it should be noted that many rank-and-file teachers usually soften or ignore the ideology as they cope with the practical tasks of teaching about the world beyond our shores.)

As a general trend, the increasing coverage of nonwestern societies is welcome. Cosmopolitanism has intellectual benefits on its own, and America's expanding role in the world and the steady globalization of both trade and popular culture make knowledge of other nations a necessity. Much less desirable is that a highly dubious ideological agenda is driving this effort. The global education ideology is being pushed by a variety of professional associations, foundations, and professors in schools of education. Perhaps most important, global education's believers exercise a strong degree of influence among textbook publishers, whose teams of multicultural advisors examine curricular materials for hints of bias or cultural insensitivity.

The global education agenda has three core elements:

- *Multicultural celebration*: An all-pervasive focus on the concept of "cultural diversity" and the need to expose students to as much of it as possible. This does help to counter a traditional overemphasis on western societies and an ethnocentric bias in the treatment of other societies. In recent years, however, textbooks and curricula have gone overboard in correcting for these deficits. Nevertheless, many educators still insist that a pro-western bias infects the teaching of world history and cultures.

- *Cultural relativism*: Global education's advocates seek to promote respect and understanding across cultures. This is all to the good. However, true respect and sympathy cannot be based on a completely relativistic approach to culture. By discouraging students who might wish to criticize negative aspects of other cultures, teachers seek to suppress an irrepressible human tendency to make moral judgments. Such pres-

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID LESH

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Students are exhorted to tolerate the intolerable by "understanding" its cultural or historical context. Here are the bombed-out remains of the Bosnian National Library, a symbol of the way in which ethnic conflict can destroy a nation's cultural heritage.

sure only generates cynicism and indifference in students, not a true spirit of tolerance.

✦ *Transnational progressivism*: Hudson Institute scholar John Fonte coined this term to refer to a hostility toward the liberal democratic nation-state and its claims to sovereignty. As Fonte puts it, the aim of transnational progressives is to redefine "democracy from a system of majority rule among equal citizens to power sharing among ethnic groups composed of both citizens and noncitizens." Now, a devotee of the American political system can hardly object to institutional arrangements that call for the sharing of power among multiple interests and groups. But transnational progressives go well beyond traditional commitments to federalism and the separation of powers within a nation. Instead, they endorse a concept of postnational (global) citizenship and seek to shift authority to an institutional network of international organizations and subnational political actors not bound by any clear democratic, constitutional framework. This view is not dominant among classroom teachers or even in the way textbooks are written. However, it is a dynamic theme pushing the social studies field forward. Those who embrace it are not content with a mere celebration of diverse societies and cultures. They see this "essentialist" view of distinct cultures as insufficiently global, and they focus instead on global trends, transnational cultural interchanges, and worldwide problems, especially those that can be depicted as rendering the nation-state obsolete. Clearly many global education advocates want Americans to doubt the ability of their national civic society to deal with global challenges.

The global education ideology deeply influences textbook publishers, whose advisors examine curricular materials for hints of cultural insensitivity.

AP Global Education

Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of the growing influence of global education is the new Advanced Placement (AP) "World History" course, which in 2001

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took its place alongside AP courses in U.S. and European history. The world history course emphasizes nonwestern societies, with no more than 30 percent of the course focusing on the West. Just as important in this regard is the program's stress on broad social, cultural, and economic trends and cross-cultural comparisons at the expense of a continuous narrative of world-shaping personalities and key historical moments. Consequently, the AP world history course, an otherwise reasonable idea, could well accelerate harmful trends in social studies by promoting the questionable global education ideology.

Like any world history course, the AP course must combine breadth with depth. Clear unifying principles must guide the selection of the facts, nations, and trends to be emphasized. The AP course attempts to avoid overwhelming the student with details by focusing on a few key themes, such as global interaction, change and continuity, technology, social structure, and gender. Yet the multicultural drive to cover all cultures equally makes it difficult to sustain the focus on themes and imposes on the course an impossibly broad reach. Moreover, by limiting coverage of the West, the course rejects what could provide a unifying principle for at least the past 500 years of world history—the central role of the West.

The thematic approach of AP world history also results in a downplaying of politics. As the course description puts it, "Knowledge of year-to-year political events is not required. The traditional political narrative is an inappropriate model for this course." The reduced attention to politics mutes the most important way in which individual human agency drives human experience.

The new AP course also deemphasizes the role of nation-states in human affairs, another characteristic of the global education ideology. The organizers of the AP world history course tell us that the past 1,000 years of history consist, essentially, of "processes that, over time, have resulted in the knitting of the world into a tightly integrated whole." In a sense, this is a truism. However, recent events should warn us about taking it too far. Our "tightly integrated" world system has not yet found a way to overcome deep religious, political, and cultural divisions. Nor does it appear to have found a way to dispense with nation-states as the preeminent players on the world stage. Downplaying the nation-state's role in history is not, or at least not yet, justified by evidence. It is an expression of ideology, not historical scholarship.

To be sure, the focus in U.S. high schools is still on U.S. history: 241,000 students took the AP exam in U.S. history in the spring of 2003, compared with 72,500 in European history and 34,000 in world history. This reflects, mostly, the fact that only 1,474 schools offered AP world history. By comparison, 3,643 and 9,202 schools offered the AP European history and U.S. history courses, respectively. However, the number of students taking AP world history increased by 64 percent from 2002 to 2003, while the increases in European history and U.S. history were just 7 percent. In any case, the story here is the creation and rising influence of a world history course that is clearly a product of the global education ideology.

> This is multiculturalism as a colorful ethnic travelogue, an incredibly superficial treatment of cultural differences around the world.

Neither "Multi" nor "Cultural"

World history textbooks in Wisconsin devote substantial space to describing the internment of Japanese-Americans in the United States during World War II, according to a recent review by Paul Kengor of the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute. Meanwhile, Kengor found little mention of Japan's treatment of POWs and other Japanese atrocities in the war, in particular the rape and murder of hundreds of thousands of civilians in Nanking in 1937.

This is characteristic of the global education ideology, which seems to hold America to far higher standards for human rights than it does other nations. Why? To put it simply, multiculturalism has less to do with any rigorous study of other cultures than it does with ethnic, gender, racial, or other subgroup tension within the nations of the West, the United States in particular. Lacking a clear, consistent, and nonideological definition of culture, global education advocates and other advocates of multiculturalism exhibit a strong tendency to identify such subgroups as "cultures," especially when they can be depicted as victims of a "dominant culture." The result is that students are taught to view the world not as multicultural but as bicultural—as a world of oppressed vs. oppressor. A key corollary is the view of the West as the one region where such subgroup "cultures" have been most grievously oppressed.

The cultural relativist stance so common in the global education field today represents a refusal to apply any universal ethical standards in judging another culture. Yet this denial

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of universal standards is itself a universal standard, usually called "tolerance." Tolerance is an admirable quality, within limits. But if tolerance is our sole universal value, are we not then called on to tolerate the intolerable? And if so called on, are we even capable of performing such an act of mental jujitsu? In fact, the pressure not to apply moral standards is more likely to produce an ethic of indifference, not one of true tolerance—as young people learn not to pass judgment on all kinds of horrendous practices, especially when they are nonwestern.

Another way to handle the challenge of tolerating the intolerable is denial. This has certainly characterized the response of many educators to the threat of Islamic radicalism. In countless ways, such educators have insisted on misinforming students about this threat by denying its links to any aspect of Islam as a religion or to the broader Muslim societies of the Middle East and Asia. And when such links cannot be ignored (as, for example, in the cases of the horrendous treatment of women by the Taliban or the rulers of Saudi Arabia, the clear calls for holy war against the infidel by many Muslim clerics, or the widespread dissemination of Nazi-level anti-Semitic propaganda throughout the Arab world), students are still exhorted to tolerate the intolerable by "understanding" its cultural or historical context to the point of excusing it all away.

Take the Islamic concept of *jihad*. Here is the definition provided in a lesson on Afghanistan in a recent issue of *Social Education*:

> *Jihad*: Arabic term meaning striving or effort in the service of God. It refers to an individual's struggle to overcome personal traits that are in conflict with the Koran. *It is often used* [italics added] to describe a war undertaken by Muslims as a sacred duty—a political or military struggle on behalf of Islam.

For most of Islam's history, the vast majority of Muslims, including Muslim scholars and religious leaders, have clearly understood *jihad* to mean primarily a holy war to expand and defend the realm of Islam. Students, however, would never know this from the passive construction of that last sentence. They might even conclude that only Eurocentric westerners see it that way. The redefinition of *jihad* as peaceful self-struggle is part of a more general tendency to soften Islam's harsher edges in dealing with it in the classroom.

This will appear cynical to students, who need only to read the daily news to learn that these are euphemisms. As Middle East scholar Daniel Pipes writes, the notion of *jihad* as mere peaceful self-struggle contradicts the headlines students see each day:

> It suggests that Osama bin Laden had no idea what he was saying when he declared *jihad* on the United States several years ago and then repeatedly murdered Americans in Somalia, at the U.S. embassies in East Africa, in the port of Aden, and then on September 11, 2001. It implies that organizations with the word "jihad" in their titles, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad and bin Laden's own "International Islamic Front for the Jihad Against Jews and Crusade[rs]," are grossly misnamed.

What accounts for this unwillingness to deal honestly with unpleasant truths about Islam? After all, educators who deny any link between Islam and violence are often perfectly happy to take note of similar facts about Christianity's past. Few textbooks today slight the Crusades, the Inquisition, the wars of religion, the persecution of witches, or the arrogance of missionaries. In fact, dwelling on such defects is seen as a necessary corrective to Eurocentric bias in world history materials and courses. This glaring double standard causes many global education and world history programs to regularly overlook or whitewash forms of injustice and brutality in other cultures that they roundly denounce in western societies.

The Unbearable Blandness of Diversity

Any worthwhile world cultures course needs a systematic concept of culture taught and then used consistently to compare societies. Such a concept would define and explain linkages between family structure, kinship grouping, language, technology, religion, art, and ethical norms and laws. Far more common instead is a seemingly random selection of disparate elements, often superficial or exotic: clothing styles, food, holidays, religious observances, leisure activities, rituals, and other customs. More often than not such features are stressed mainly to provide a sense of difference and to "celebrate diversity"; they do not have much context to give them real meaning. Rarely is anything included that might strike a typical western student as objectionable, such as female circumcision, slavery in the Sudan, China's one-child policies, or religious discrimination.

Consider a popular world history textbook intended for use in grades 9–12, *Modern World History: Patterns of Interaction*, published by McDougal Littell, a Houghton Mifflin imprint. The book devotes a page to African textiles under the heading "History Through Art." Brief paragraphs describe the various kinds of cloth and the "cultures" that produce them. The text claims that historians can learn much about each group's myths, celebrations, and social roles from these fabrics. What students learn from this page, however, is a good deal less than that. Take a representative paragraph on Kuba cloth:

> Made by Kuba people of the Congo, this cloth was made

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of raffia, a palm-leaf fiber. The cloth design was based on traditional geometric styles. The cloth was worn at ceremonial events, was used as currency, and may have been offered for part of a dowry.

This is all very interesting. However, since the Kuba people are never again mentioned in the textbook, students never learn why geometric styles were used or what their symbolic meaning to the Kuba might be. No description of Kuba "ceremonial events" is offered. Nor is the Kuba economy described or Kuba family structure analyzed, hence the significance of Kuba cloth as currency or as part of a dowry goes unexamined. The page is located in the middle of a chapter entitled "The Age of Imperialism, 1850–1914." However, no connection is made between the information on the page and the chapter's historical theme, and there is no overall concept of culture that might explain the cultural artifacts depicted.

This is multiculturalism as a kind of exotic and colorful ethnic travelogue. It exemplifies an incredibly superficial treatment of stylistic cultural differences around the world. To avoid giving offense, only uplifting aspects of any culture are normally stressed in this approach. Even when something unpleasant is dealt with, it is done so indirectly, vaguely, and only if it can be presented within an acceptable multiculturalist framework.

An especially odd example of this appears in McDougal Littell's *World Cultures and Geography*. A paragraph headed "Government in Rwanda" describes the events of the 1990s. One would naturally expect the passage to deal with the tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups and the tragic way in which they led to one of the worst slaughters in history. In its defense, the book does very briefly mention these events on an earlier page. However, in this particular passage, it gives them a very peculiar spin:

> In 1991, a new constitution was passed. It gave women the right to own property and hold jobs. But the new laws were not enforced. Then, in 1994, a civil war began in Rwanda. So many men were killed that women began taking over as heads of households. Finally, as a result of the deadly wars, women were able to claim their constitutional rights.

Amazingly, the passage manages to turn one of the century's worst acts of genocide into a "civil war" that inadvertently advanced the rights of women! Even the issue of women's rights in Rwanda is itself unlikely to be understood outside a modern western framework. This is the key point about the blandness of diversity. Without solid historical context *and* a strong grounding in their own western cultural heritage, students will not be able to grasp fully how other cultures differ from that heritage. To understand the role of women in Rwanda, for instance, one needs to know what ideas prevail there about the relationships among individuals and family, community, and state. Moreover, to fully appreciate these relationships as "different" from their own, students also need some awareness of western ideas about the individual's relationship to authority as these have evolved from feudalism and the Magna Carta, to Locke and Jefferson, to the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen," and on to Seneca Falls and the modern women's rights movement. An uncritical celebration of multiculturalism cannot provide this context, and it cannot lead to a true appreciation of cultural difference.

The passage manages to turn one of the century's worst acts of genocide into a "civil war" that inadvertently advanced the rights of women!

The global education ideology detailed here results in excessive breadth of coverage as well as a lack of rigor in the study of world history and the evaluation of other cultures. In its most concentrated form, it instills a deep skepticism about the political worth of the nation-state and support for a divisive, anti-western form of multiculturalism. It claims to offer a broader, more tolerant approach to world culture and history. And it claims to offer students a more active learning experience, one that will move them to participate as global citizens in building a better world. But in fact, by suppressing the student's natural tendency to make—and to want to make—moral judgments; by relentlessly denigrating the student's core western cultural heritage; and by pandering to the supposed victim status of some cultures in relation to others, this ideology is a recipe for further alienating a generation already too comfortable with a fashionable distrust of authority.

–Jonathan Burack, a former secondary-school history and social studies teacher, has produced curriculum materials in history for the past 20 years. This essay is excerpted from his chapter in Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong? *(Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2003).*

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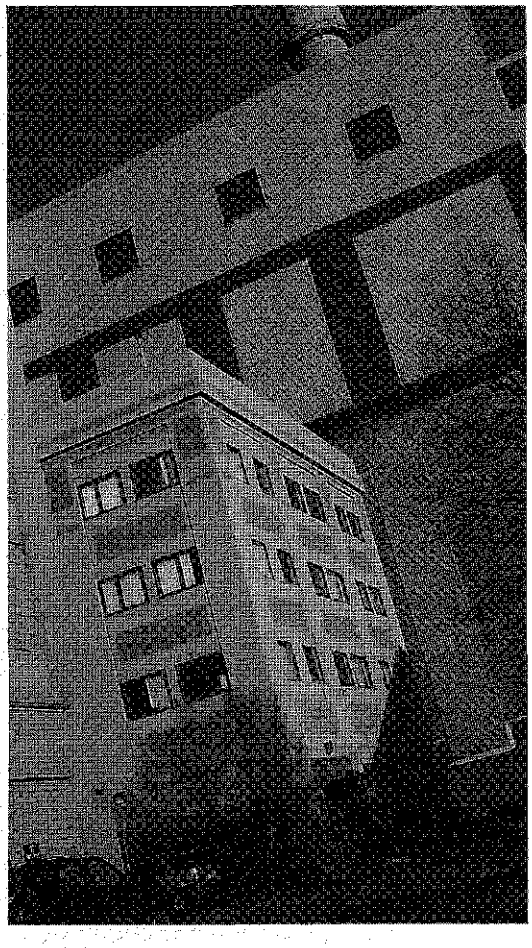
Charter schools in search of good homes

A Building Need



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK ALCAREZ

THE 1,100 STUDENTS AT E. A. OLLE MIDDLE School in suburban Houston enjoy a relatively new facility, built in 1988 and renovated since, with grounds that include an athletic field and even an amateur radio station. Just a few miles away, their 330 peers at Houston's KIPP Academy, a public charter school, benefit from an even newer facility, built in 2001. But this is the sixth location that KIPP (the "Knowledge Is Power Program") has occupied since 1996. Between 1996 and mid-2001, KIPP's itinerant band of students in grades 5 through 9 had to travel to borrowed or leased space in various venues, including an office complex and the campus of a local university.

Moreover, while the construction of E. A. Olle was managed by the Houston school district and financed with a mixture of state and local funds, the educators at KIPP had to scrape together funding (from foundations, individual donors, community banks, and other sources during an 18-month capital campaign) to build a permanent facility for their students. Not only were they responsible for their students' learning; they also had to gain expertise in real-estate development.

This tale of two schools illustrates a fundamental challenge faced by the charter school movement. Charter schools are publicly funded, yet privately managed under the terms of a

by KIM SMITH & JAMES WILLCOX, WITH JULIE LANDRY

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Charter schools must often use part of their operating funds to lease space. As the pictures accompanying this essay reveal, financial constraints can lead to a wide variety in the style and quality of charter-school facilities.

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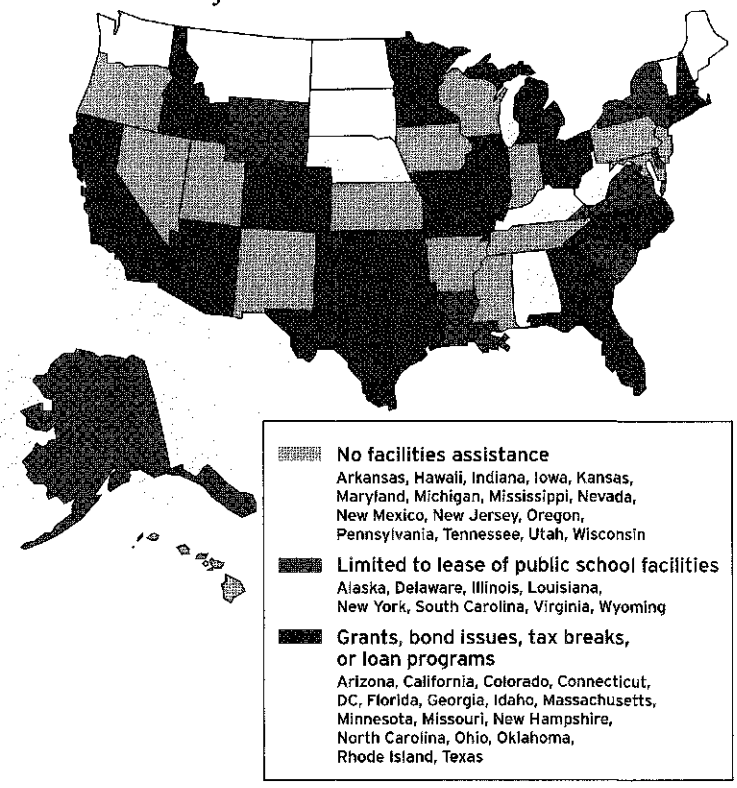
State Aid for Charter Facilities (Figure 1)

Twenty-four states plus the District of Columbia provide facilities assistance to charter schools.


No facilities assistance
Arkansas, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Utah, Wisconsin
Limited to lease of public school facilities
Alaska, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, New York, South Carolina, Virginia, Wyoming
Grants, bond issues, tax breaks, or loan programs
Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, DC, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Texas

Note: Unshaded states have not passed charter authorization laws. Iowa, Maryland, and New Hampshire have charter authorization laws on the books but no charter schools in operation. All states listed as providing assistance also allow existing public schools to convert to charter schools. Mississippi, listed as not providing assistance, does not allow start-up charter schools but does allow conversion charter schools.

Facilities Assistance in Selected States

California
- State Charter School Revolving Loans Fund provides low-interest loans up to $250,000, with five years for repayment.
- Charter schools in low-income areas receive up to $750 per student toward lease costs.
- Unused school district facilities available for lease.

Colorado
- Qualified charter schools receive $332 per pupil in capital construction funds.
- State may issue bonds on behalf of charter schools.
- Charter school debt reserve fund enhances charters' ability to borrow funds from the state and to obtain lower interest rates.
- Unused district facilities available rent-free; other costs for facilities operations and maintenance are negotiated.

Florida
- $835, $957, and $1,267 per pupil each year for elementary, middle, and high schools, respectively.
- Exemption from ad valorem facilities taxes and some property taxes.
- Unused district facilities available to charters on the same basis as other public schools.

SOURCE: Education Commission of the States and Center for Education Reform; U.S. Charter Schools

charter with a governing body, whether it be the state, a local authorizing board, a local school district, or a university. Even though charter schools are public schools, and often serve the neediest children in a given area, they rarely receive adequate funding for facilities (see Figure 1). This means that they must use part of their operating funds to lease space—often leaving just 80 percent of their resources available to support instruction. Moreover, charter schools' per-student allocation is typically less than district schools receive for their ongoing instructional and administrative expenses. Consequently, most charter school operators are forced to pay for facilities costs out of an already slim operating budget.

According to the Center for Education Reform, as of January 2003 there were nearly 2,700 charter schools serving more than 684,000 students in 36 states and the District of Columbia, just a decade after the first charter opened its doors. However, the troubles charter operators face as they struggle to find and finance adequate facilities threaten to retard this growth. Moreover, at the individual school level, instruction can suffer as crucial resources are diverted to solving the real-estate problem.

The lack of facilities financing leaves charter schools competing with traditional public schools on an uneven playing field.

This situation endangers the basic accountability equation that served as the rationale for creating charter schools in the first place. Under the terms of their charter, which is typically up for renewal every five years, charter schools are expected to deliver improved academic results in return for freedom from many state and local mandates. However, the lack of facilities financing leaves them competing with traditional public schools on an uneven playing field. The principal of a traditional public school is not charged with coaxing capital funds out of voters, scoping out real estate, or overseeing construction. By contrast, charter school leaders often spend significant time trying to secure loans or donations to cover facilities costs as well as managing any construction or renovation.

A number of states and private foundations are working

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to address this inequity. Their innovative solutions, profiled below, have the potential to provide charter school students with the productive learning environments they deserve.

Improving Access to Capital

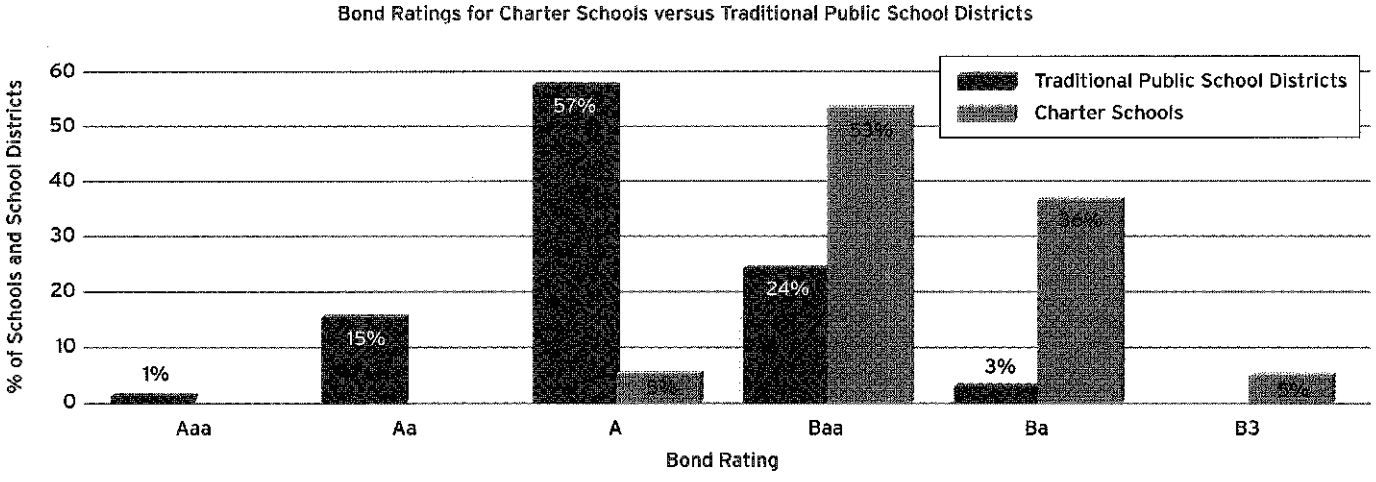
To a lender, loaning money to a charter school can look risky, since most charter schools are approved for only a five-year term, can suffer delays in their cash flow due to the quirks of state finance systems, and typically have a limited or nonexistent credit history. Even the small number of mature charter schools that seek to float bonds in order to finance their facilities carry low bond ratings relative to traditional public schools (see Figure 2). This all translates into high interest rates that leave the majority of charter schools—especially individual schools in low-income areas—out of luck. As a result, most charter schools lease their facilities rather than purchase or build their own (see Figure 3). This is encouraged by state policies that frequently provide lease aid rather than capital funding.

One solution being tried by a range of institutions from the federal government to local community development organizations is to make charter schools look more attractive to lenders by promising to repay the loan should the school default. This is similar to the approach followed in higher education, where federal guarantees ensure that students have access to low-interest loans.

Traditionally, the U.S. Department of Education has

Risky Business (Figure 2)

Moody's Investors Service currently rates 19 separate bond issues to finance charter school facilities. The median bond rating for these is Baa3, considerably below the A3 rating for traditional public schools' debt. Only two charter schools rated by Moody's have a "positive outlook," meaning Moody's expects credit quality to potentially improve within two years.



Note: Moody's rates $297 million in outstanding charter school debt.

SOURCE: Moody's Investors Service, July 2003

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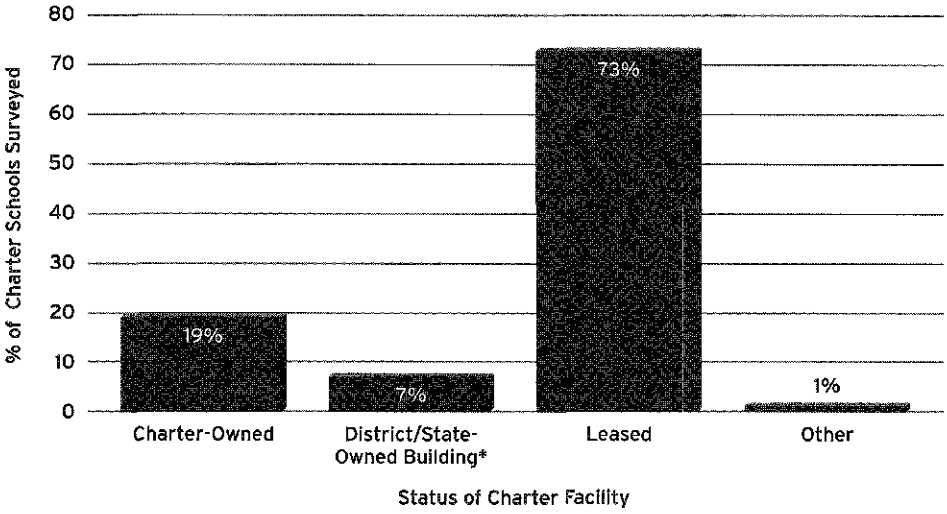
steered clear of broad school construction efforts (with the exception of one-time appropriations like the $1.2 billion infusion approved in 2000 for school building renovations and emergency repairs). However, Congress has authorized funding to "test and demonstrate strategies for helping charter schools with varying degrees of creditworthiness gain access to financing for facilities." About $50 million was appropriated in 2001 and 2003, with up to $75 million more waiting to be approved by Congress for the next fiscal year. For example, NCB Development Corporation used its $6.4 million grant to create the Charter School Capital Access Program; the grant dollars comprise a "first loss reserve"—money that serves as a buffer for lenders in case payments fall through—on a $45 million loan pool that NCB and the Reinvestment Fund raised from large financial institutions.

To Lease or to Buy? (Figure 3)

Almost three-quarters of 118 charter schools surveyed in 2001 lease their facilities, reflecting both the difficulties they face in securing loans and the fact that states often provide lease but not construction aid.



*Probably at no rent or nominal charge; all eight charters in this category responded "Other" and wrote in "district" or "state" when asked to explain.

Note: Data compiled from a survey of charter schools in 18 states, about 6 percent of all charter schools in April of 2001 when the survey was concluded.

SOURCE: Charter Friends National Network & Ksixteen LLC

Charter schools are also using state and federal programs that provide loan guarantees for "community facilities." For instance, charter schools in rural areas are eligible for loan guarantees under a U.S. Department of Agriculture program. On a local level, some districts have even extended loan guarantees to charter schools. Chicago Public Schools recently guaranteed $4.5 million of a $5.5 million letter of credit for Perspectives Charter School, a charter school serving a diverse, low-income population in grades 6–12 in downtown Chicago. With that help and the backing of local foundations, Perspectives was able to negotiate favorable terms for a new, permanent 30,000 square-foot building (on a lot leased from Chicago Public Schools, which no longer needed the space).

Even making the payments on a low-interest loan is a heavy burden for many charter schools.

Nevertheless, even with the help of loan guarantees, lenders are still reluctant to do business with any but the most sophisticated of charter school operators. This is where federal tax incentives may help. For instance, the $15 billion New Markets Tax Credits initiative provides lenders with credits against their federal income taxes in return for investing in businesses that serve low-income communities. One of the 2003 allocations went to Self-Help Ventures Fund in Durham, North Carolina, which will use its $75 million allotment to originate loans for commercial and community facilities, including charter schools.

At the state level, Colorado and Michigan now allow bond authorities to issue tax-exempt bonds on behalf of charter schools. States and philanthropists have also been working to increase the available pool of debt by creating "revolving" pools of loan capital. They are "revolving" in the sense that the loans are designed to be repaid quickly, when longer-term debt becomes available as the charter school develops a track record. Perhaps the best-known example is the Illinois Facilities Fund, which Chicago Public Schools seeded with $2 million in 1997 to make low-cost loans to charter

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schools. Since Illinois passed its charter school law in 1996, Chicago's public school district officials have viewed charters as another path to district improvement, especially for its high schools, and even went so far as to support an increase on the city's charter cap from 15 to 30. The district's relatively small charter office (four full-time employees) relies heavily on its ability to leverage the rest of the district's resources, which may account for the charter office's close relationship with other reform initiatives.

Providing cheap financing to charter schools is also a relatively easy way for philanthropies to get involved. Nationwide, foundations hold about $475 billion in their endowments, but use just $225.6 million of that for charitable loans or program-related investments, according to the Foundation Center. Committing even a small fraction of the remaining endowments to easing charter schools' access to capital would make a huge difference to the charter school movement; what's more, these loans will be repaid over time, allowing foundations to "recycle" the capital.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Affordable Buildings for Children's Development (ABCD) initiative is a useful model. ABCD is a loan pool, funded by Packard and others, to be used in building preschool facilities. Charter schools could benefit from a similar structure, and in fact represent less risky investments than preschools, since they are funded by the state rather than by individual families.

Public Resources for Public Schools

Loan guarantees and access to low-cost financing are welcome reforms, but they fail to solve the fundamental problem. Even making the payments on a low-interest loan is a heavy burden for many charter schools—a burden that detracts from their ability to offer a high-quality education.

As public schools, charter schools deserve access to the public resources that traditional public schools make use

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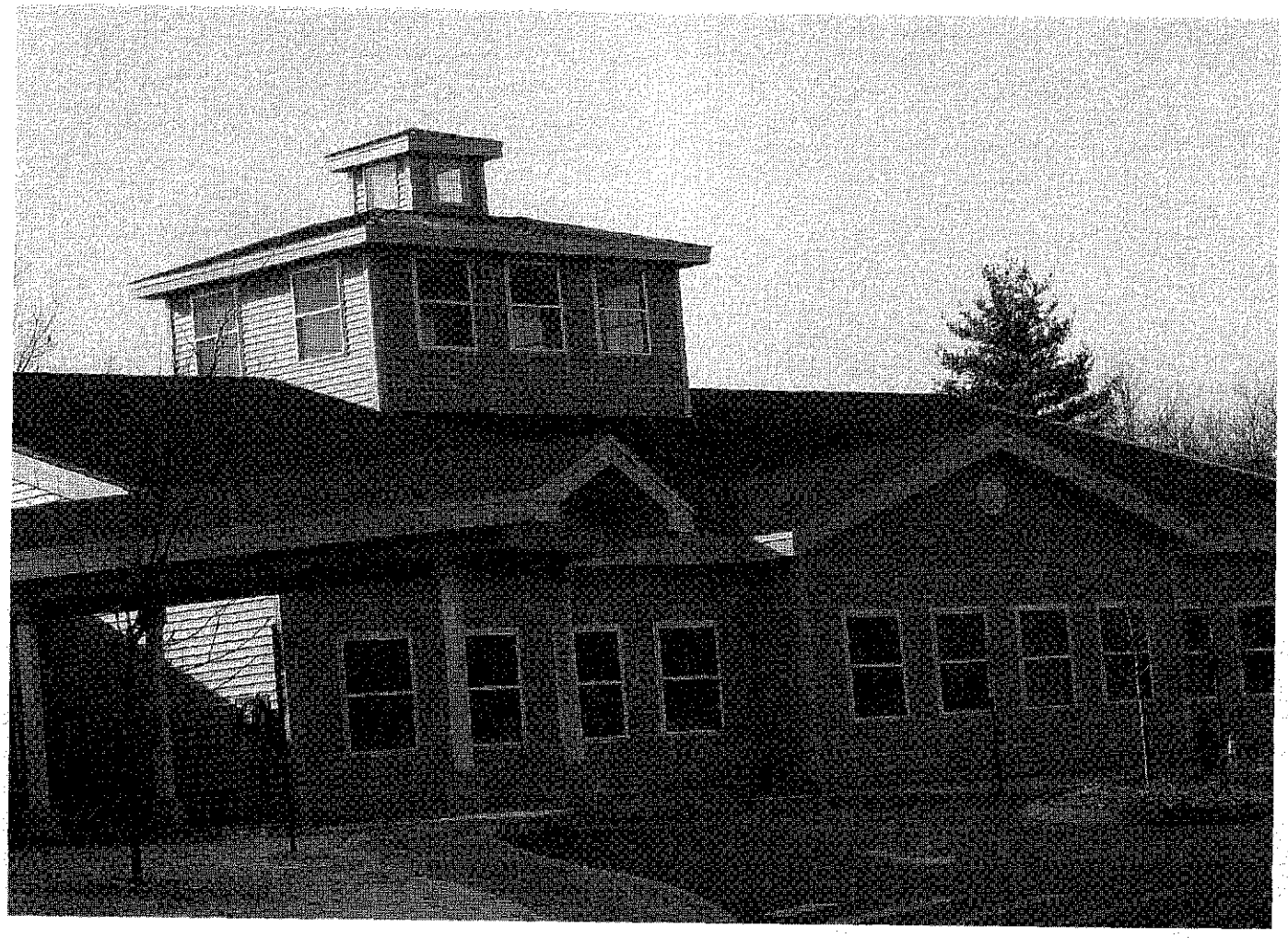

of, including tax revenues, state bond proceeds, and existing educational facilities. Among the states, Minnesota (home of the nation's first charter law), Florida, and California allocate some financial assistance for lease payments to charter schools on a per-pupil basis, similar to the way in which operating funds are distributed. Making state bond funds available to charter schools is an uphill battle, but California recently allocated to charter schools $100 million of an $11.4 billion bond package for K–12 education facilities. However, this represents less than 1 percent of the bond package, when charter schools account for 4.5 percent of California's public schools and serve about 2.5 percent of the state's K–12 public school students.

States are also requiring school districts to make more creative use of their facilities to accommodate the growth of charter schools. In California, districts must provide charter schools in their area with facilities that are "contiguous, furnished, and equipped" and "reasonably equivalent" to those of the public schools run by the district—and can charge charter schools rent for that space. In New York, both the state and districts must release a list of vacant or unused public buildings for charter schools to pursue.

In the coming years, federal policy may compel more of this activity. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that students in schools that fail to make "adequate yearly progress" for

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two years in a row be given the opportunity to transfer to another public school. Consequently, districts may be more willing to provide space to promising charter school operators who can provide a high-quality option for these students.

Exiting the Facilities Business

A more comprehensive approach would take charter schools out of the facilities business altogether. After all, real-estate development is not, and should not be, the core competency of charter school leaders.

One potential solution is to establish the nonprofit equivalent of private-sector real-estate investment trusts, or REITs. REITs take a pool of investment capital and use it to develop and manage a group of commercial and residential properties. The nonprofit analogue, which Paul Hill of the University of Washington has proposed as a solution to the facilities challenges of all public schools, would aggregate financing for charter school facilities and develop sites for a "portfolio" of schools. Thus it would spread the cost of an expert team of developers over many more facility deals and could afford to hire people with financing expertise, construction management skills, contractor relationships, and experience in legal and government approvals.

By serving an entire region or market's group of charter schools, the real-estate trust would look familiar to state officials and to lenders: a single entity that grasps the intricacies of real-estate finances and serves the individual needs of multiple schools, as school districts do. As a result, it would provide an easy means by which foundations could accelerate the scaling up of the charter school movement. It would also give states an efficient way to support the facilities needs of many charter schools at once, instead of on a school-by-school basis.

In addition, by serving multiple charter schools, a trust wouldn't be crippled by the closure of a single charter school. In fact, it would operate with a ready pipeline of potential tenants who would be eager to step into vacant space. This lowered risk would entice more private-sector lenders, reducing the cost of ownership.

Waiting lists alone indicate that there is a demand for 900 more charter schools, and that doesn't even account for the fact that charters now serve relatively few areas. But until we provide charter school operators with equivalent facilities funding, we can't tap into this potential source of seats for students stuffed into overcrowded schools. Nor can we properly assess the movement's real potential for improving student outcomes.

Real-estate development is not, and should not be, the core competency of charter school leaders.

–Kim Smith and James Willcox are CEO and principal, respectively, at NewSchools Venture Fund, where Julie Landry is communications manager.

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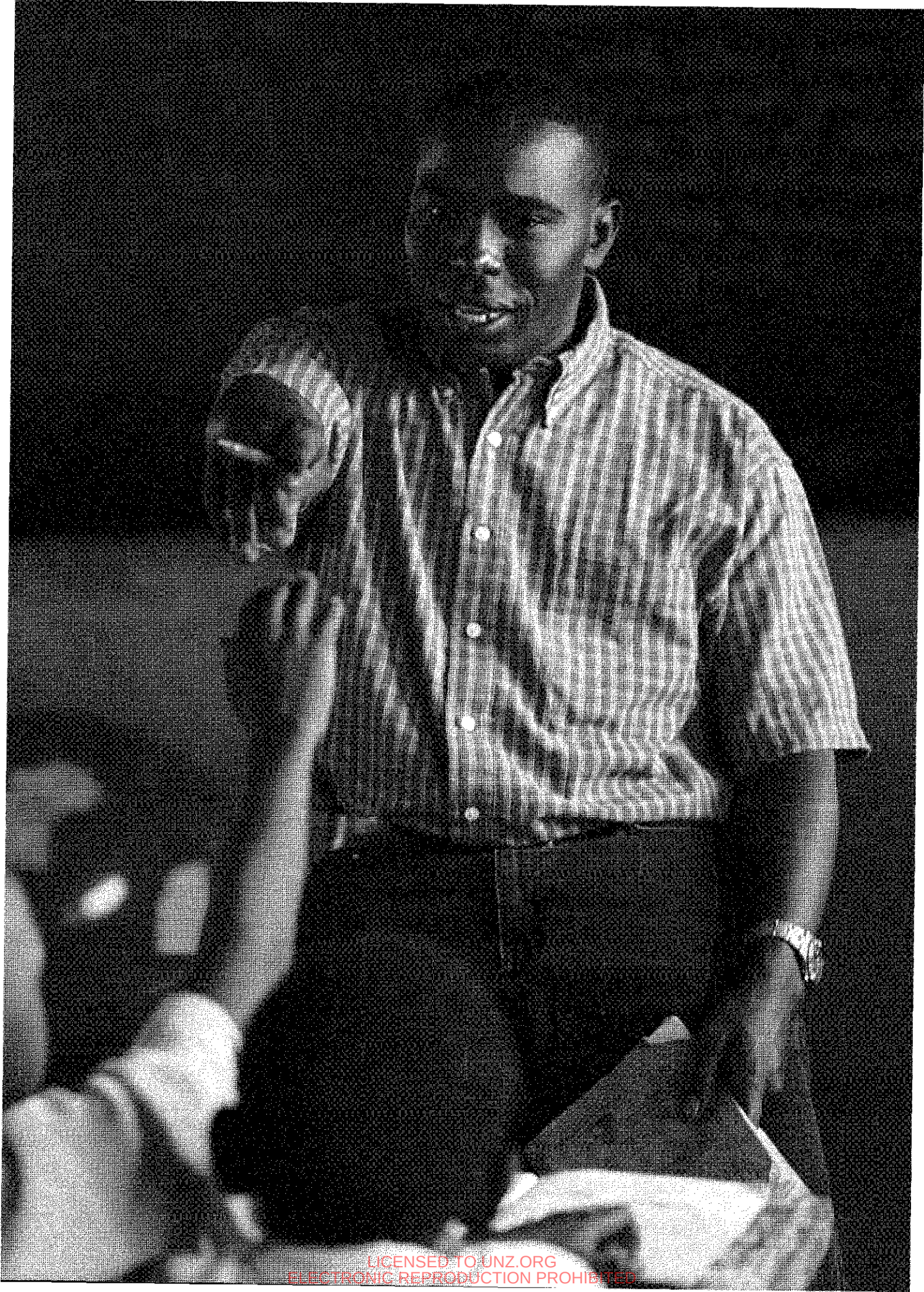

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the RACE CONNECTION

Are teachers more effective with students who share their ethnicity?

by THOMAS S. DEE

In the mid-1960s, an acquaintance of mine was a young, timid teacher beginning her career in a virtually all-black high school on the South Side of Chicago. Even to this day, she recalls two events from that period. On one occasion, she saw a burly white male teacher telling a group of black teenagers that they were stupid and that they had better realize it. On another occasion, she observed as a classroom of unruly adolescents was silenced by the fixed stare of a black female teacher, whose disciplinary approach surely reminded many of their mothers at home.

The contrast between these two teachers, while more extreme than one usually finds, either then or now, nevertheless helps to explain why so many are urging the nation to recruit more minority teachers. The availability of minority teachers appears to be an important issue. While 17 percent of the students in K–12 public schools are black, black teachers make up just 8 percent of the teaching force (see Figure 1). These disparities are even more pronounced in many urban schools, where student bodies that are nearly 100 percent minority are often taught by majority-white teaching staffs.

However, we actually know very little about how differences between a teacher's race and those of her students affect the learning environment. This study makes use of data from a randomized field trial conducted in Tennessee to produce higher-quality information on this controversial subject than has been available previously. The results are troubling. Black students learn more from black teachers and white students from white teachers, suggesting that the racial dynamics within classrooms may contribute to the persistent racial gap in student performance, at least in Tennessee.

Why Race Could Matter

The racial interactions between teachers and students could influence student performance in several ways. For example, pupils may trust and respect someone with whom they share a salient characteristic, making learning come more eas-

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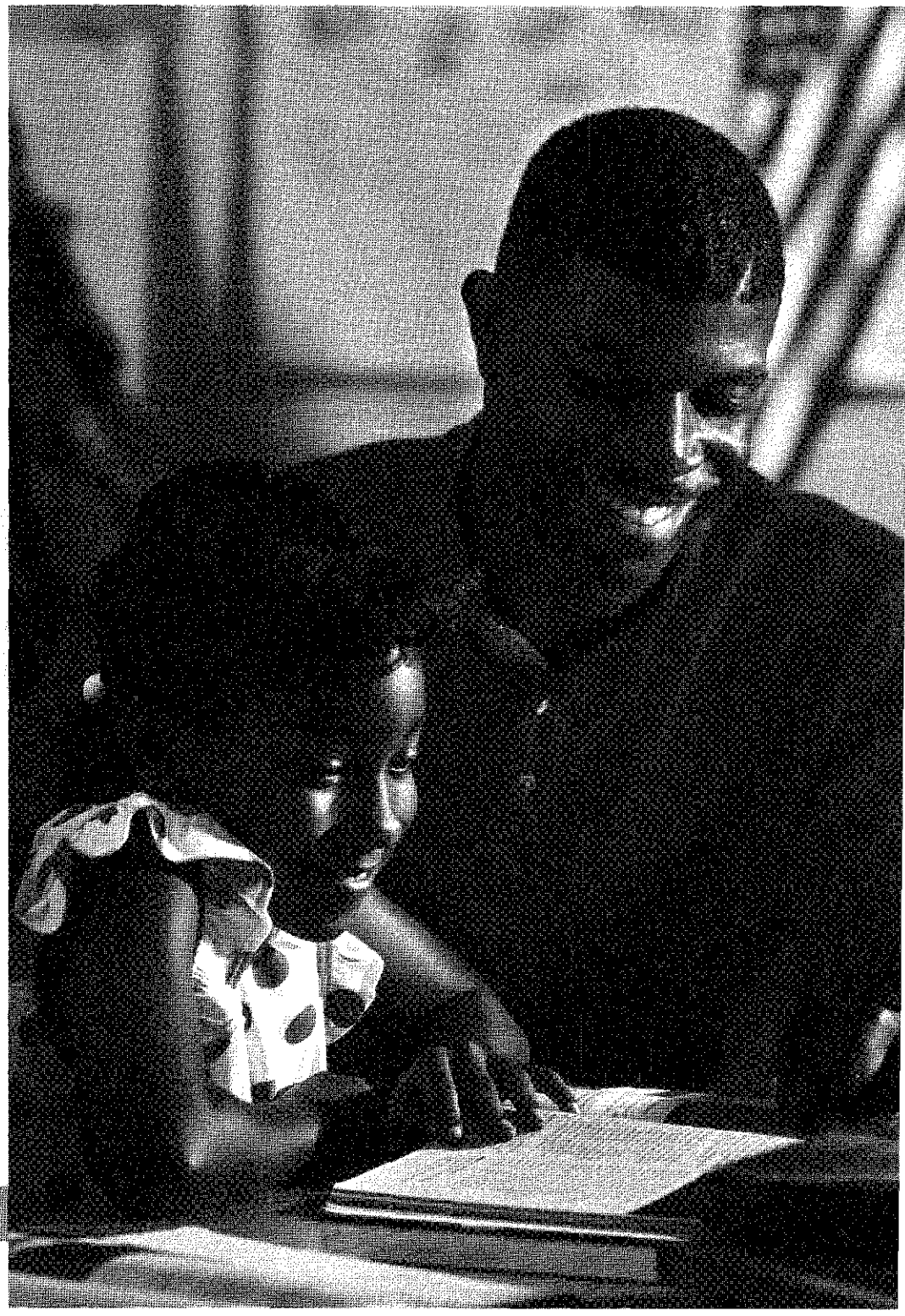
ily. Likewise, a teacher of the same race may serve as a more effective role model, boosting students' confidence and enthusiasm for learning. However, while such role-model effects are widely believed to be important, there is actually little direct empirical evidence that they exist.

Claude M. Steele's theory of "stereotype threat" suggests another way that student performance might respond to a teacher's race (and one for which there is empirical support). Stereotype threat can occur in situations where students perceive that a stereotype regarding their ability will come into play—such as when a black student is taught by a white teacher.

A series of experiments conducted at Stanford University by Steele and Joshua Aronson appear to confirm the existence of the stereotype threat phenomenon. Groups of students took tests comprising the most difficult items on the verbal GRE exam. When told beforehand that the test was a laboratory problem-solving task unrelated to ability, black and white students performed similarly. However, black students performed relatively worse when told that the test was diagnostic of ability. The racial differences were similar when researchers merely asked students to fill out a pretest demographic questionnaire that inquired into their race, a minor manipulation of the stereotype threat.



Minority teachers may be more generous with minority students, devoting more time to them and making more favorable assumptions about their capabilities. White teachers may be relatively generous with white students in just the same ways.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GETTY IMAGES

There may also be (largely unintended) racial biases in teachers' behavior. In particular, minority teachers may be more generous with minority students, devoting more time to them and making more favorable assumptions about their capabilities. White teachers may be relatively generous with white students in just the same ways. A limited body of experimental evidence does suggest that teachers, in allocating class time, interacting with students, and designing class materials, are more favorably disposed toward students who share their racial or ethnic background. For example, a 1979 study by Marylee Taylor placed white teachers in a teaching environment where they could not observe the stu-

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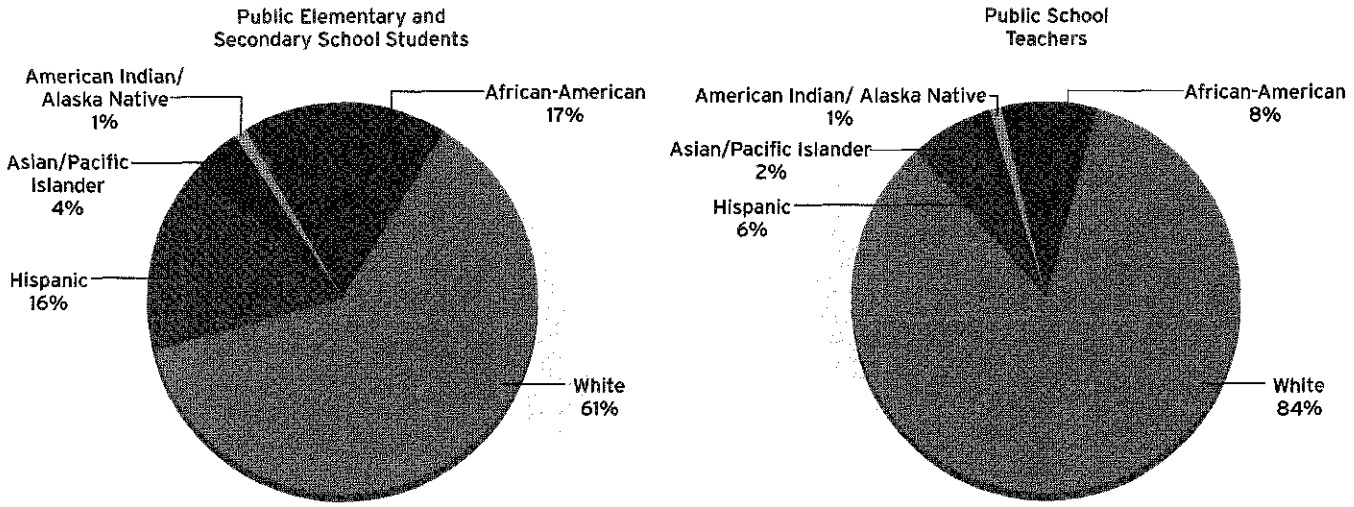
The Need for Minority Teachers (Figure 1)

The student population in America's public schools is 17 percent African-American, yet African-American teachers compose just 8 percent of the teaching workforce.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education. Data are as of Spring 2000

dent directly. Taylor found that the teachers provided less coaching and briefer, less positive feedback when told beforehand that the student was black. Similarly, studies based on observations from actual classrooms often find that black students with white teachers receive less attention, are praised less, and are scolded more often than their white counterparts.

However, there is surprisingly little empirical evidence on the relationship between students' exposure to teachers of their own race and their subsequent academic performance. And the available studies, all of which rely on observational data to compare the test scores of students with different kinds of teachers, actually find that having a teacher of the same race has little impact. However, the inferences based on conventional data sets could be quite misleading. For example, if lower-performing black students are more likely to be assigned to black teachers, the effects of such teachers will be underestimated.

Experimental evidence suggests that teachers, in interacting with students, are more favorably disposed toward those who share their racial or ethnic background.

Project STAR

This study presents new evidence on the test-score consequences of a teacher's race by examining data from Tennessee's well-known experiment in reducing class size, Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio). A key feature of Project STAR's experimental design was the random assignment of both students and teachers to specific classrooms within each school. Project STAR was not designed to evaluate the relationship between students' performance and their assignment to teachers of their own race. Nonetheless, the study's randomized pairings of students and teachers provide an excellent opportunity to do so.

Project STAR followed a cohort of students from 79 schools as they progressed from kindergarten through 3rd grade. Within each school, students and teachers were assigned randomly to classrooms of three types: a small class of 15 students and two regular-sized classes of 22 students (one with a teacher's aide). Started in 1985 with 6,325 kindergartners, the study ultimately came to include roughly 11,600 students, with 2,200, 1,600, and 1,200 students entering in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades, respectively. Stu-

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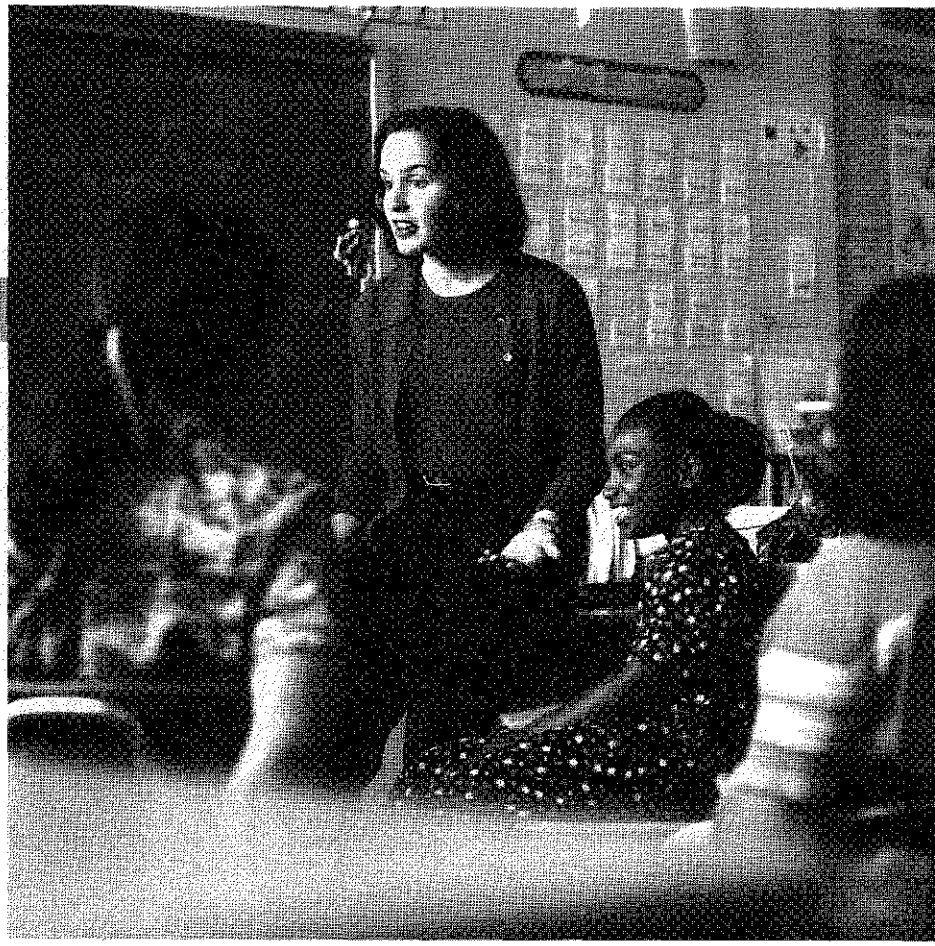

Roughly two-thirds of the students in the Project STARsample were white. Of these students, 94 percent were in classrooms with white teachers during their current academic year, while just 45 percent of black students had black teachers—an indication of the relative scarcity of black teachers among the participating schools.

dents were administered the Stanford Achievement Tests in math and reading in the spring of each study year.

Given Project STAR's limited number of Hispanic, Asian, and Native American participants, I edited these data to include only those observations from black and white non-Hispanic students with black and white non-Hispanic teachers. This process excluded just 95 students from the original 6,325 kindergartners. A small number of students with missing test scores or other data were also excluded.

Overall, roughly two-thirds of the students in the remaining sample were white. Of these students, 94 percent were in classrooms with white teachers during their current academic year, while just 45 percent of black students had black teachers—an indication of the relative scarcity of black teachers among the participating schools. The racial distributions varied dramatically among schools. For example, in the 16 participating city schools, 97 percent of the students and half of the teachers were black. By contrast, in the 7 urban schools outside of large cities and in the 38 rural schools, 93 percent of the students and 97 percent of the teachers were white. The 18 suburban schools were more integrated, with African-Americans composing 38 percent of the students and 26 percent of the teachers.

Like any large-scale social experiment, Project STAR had some potentially troublesome complications. For example, roughly 10 percent of students moved between small and regular classes, largely because of parental complaints or behavioral problems. Furthermore, the study had fairly high rates of attrition, ranging from 20 to 30 percent of students per year. This attrition could reflect ordinary factors unrelated to the study, such as students' moving out of a school's geographic zone or having to repeat a grade, as well as families' responses to being assigned to a particular class.

Fortunately, these problems seem less important for a study of teachers' race than for one of class size. When sending their child to a school, parents presumably had fairly sound expectations regarding the probability that their child would be assigned a teacher of the same race. And, since teachers and students would be reassigned in the next academic year, the racial pairings in a given year do not provide very strong incentives to leave the school. By contrast, students assigned to large classes were expected to remain in large classes through the 3rd grade.

It is nonetheless important to consider whether Project STAR's deviations from an ideal experimental design might influence this study's results. For most of the analysis, I use a data set created by pooling the observations from all four years for a total of 23,883 observations with math scores and 23,544 with reading scores. Aggregating the data in this way is useful since it provides enough observations to look separately at students grouped by race and gender. The larger sample also makes it possible to consider the cumulative effects of exposure over a number of years to an own-race teacher.

To evaluate whether the experiment successfully matched students and teachers of different races in a random manner, I examined the association between students' traits

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and their assignment to an own-race teacher. If the matching of students and teachers were indeed random, we should find no within-school association between observed student traits and exposure to an own-race teacher. Evaluations confirmed that this was indeed the case: students' gender, age, eligibility for the free lunch program, and class-size assignment all exhibit small and statistically weak within-school relationships with assignment to an own-race teacher.

Differences in teacher quality cannot explain the achievement gains associated with students' having teachers who share their race.

Results

My research design effectively compared the performance of students assigned to teachers of the same race with the performance of students who were assigned to teachers of a different race but who were in the same grade and who entered the experiment in the same school and year. Restricting the comparison to students who entered the experiment in the same school and year is essential because this was the level at which random assignment took place. The analysis also took into account students' age, gender, eligibility for the free lunch program, and whether they had been assigned to a small class, as well as variables measuring the demographic composition of the student's class.

Among black children, the results indicate that having a black teacher for a year was associated with a statistically significant 3 to 5 percentile-point increase in math scores. On the reading test, the scores of black pupils with black teachers were 3 to 6 percentile points higher. Meanwhile, white pupils of both genders placed with a white teacher scored 4 to 5 percentile points higher in math. In reading, white boys had scores 2 to 6 points higher when learning from a teacher of their own race, but for white girls, no significant differences could be detected.

The Role of Teacher Quality

The chief obstacle to attributing these sizable differences to the race of the teacher is the possibility that they are instead a function of differences in teacher quality that could not be directly observed. For instance, the results for black students are consistent with the plausible alternative hypothesis that predominantly black schools tend to attract and retain high-quality black teachers but only low-quality white teachers. Similarly, the results for white students could merely reflect the possibility that the black teachers in predominantly white schools tend to be of lower quality than the white teachers in those schools. Furthermore, given the severe segregation of students by race across most of these schools, it is also possible that both types of bias (relatively low-quality white teachers in black schools and relatively low-quality black teachers in white schools) occurred simultaneously.

To begin testing for this possibility, I first reanalyzed the data, taking into account the degree to which teachers' years of experience, levels of education, and merit-pay classification might have influenced students' performance. (Notably, the Project STAR data do not provide information on teachers' gender. In all likelihood, this was intended to preserve teachers' confidentiality since there were so few males in the sample.) Including these observed teacher traits in the analysis had no appreciable effect on the performance gains associated with assignment to a teacher of the same race.

However, previous research has shown that these teacher traits are not always associated with significant gains in achievement. Consequently, there is still reason to be concerned that the apparent effects of a teacher's race actually reflect unobserved but race-specific differences in teacher quality.

An admittedly indirect way to evaluate the effects of these unobserved differences in teacher quality is to consider how the performance gain associated with having a teacher of the same race varies across different types of schools. Schools with relatively few disadvantaged students are widely thought to be able to recruit teachers of higher and more uniform quality. Similarly, schools with students of predominantly one race may be able to recruit only low-quality teachers of the other race. If these assumptions hold, evidence that the effects of being assigned to a teacher who shares one's race are concentrated in disadvantaged or highly segregated schools would suggest that differences in teacher quality are influencing the findings to some degree.

To test this proposition, I identified schools as disadvantaged if an above-average share of its students were receiving free lunches. Likewise, for both white and black students, I identified schools as segregated if the share of black or white students was above the average for each race.

Among white students, the results indicate that being assigned to a white teacher had similar effects regardless of school type. Assuming that these schools differ in their ability to recruit good teachers, this pattern suggests that differences in teacher quality are not distorting the findings on the effect of white students' being exposed to white teachers.

By contrast, among black students, the benefits of hav-

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ing a black teacher were concentrated in schools with higher levels of disadvantage and racial segregation. This is consistent with the notion that the apparent achievement gains associated with having a black teacher reflect in part the relatively low quality of white teachers who work in more disadvantaged schools and in schools with large populations of African-American students. However, the same differences could also indicate that classroom racial dynamics, such as stereotype threat and role-model effects, are particularly relevant in more disadvantaged and segregated black communities.

Within-Classroom Comparisons

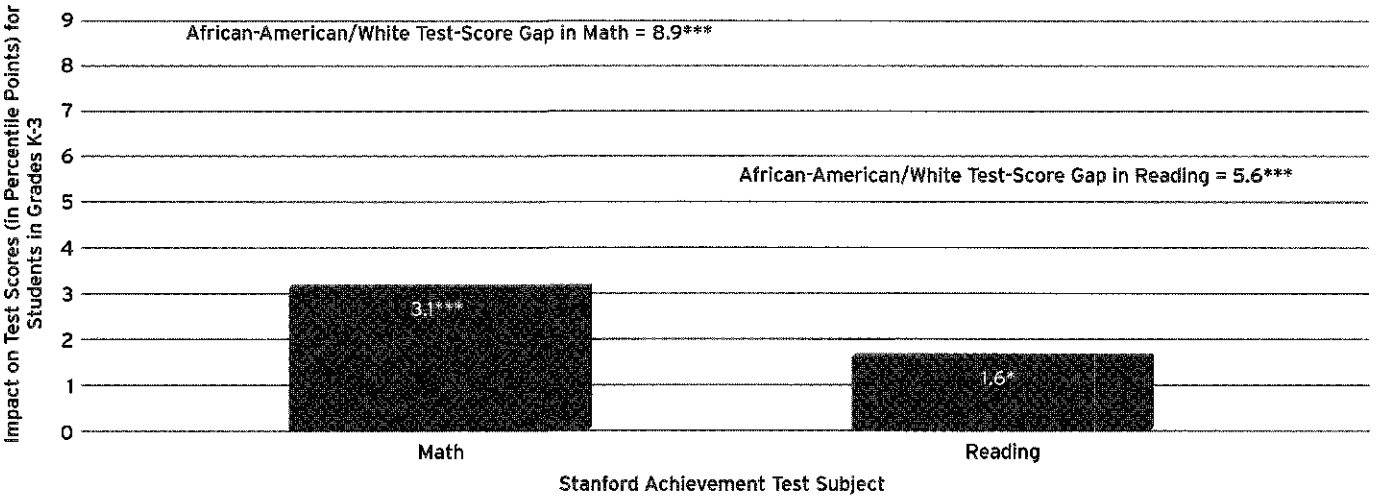
A more straightforward way to assess this concern is to compare students within the same classrooms, some of whom share the teacher's race while others do not. In effect, this technique holds teacher quality constant by comparing the relative performance of white and black students under the same teacher. A disadvantage of this approach is that it is no longer possible to look separately at students grouped by race and gender.

In this analysis, students still performed better when taught by teachers of their own race, but the effects were somewhat less dramatic. In mathematics, the observed gain for all students dropped slightly, from 3.8 to 3.1 percentile points. Nevertheless, the effect was still quite large (representing 35 percent of the corresponding black-white test-score gap in this data set) and statistically significant. In reading, the observed gain declined from 3.1 to 1.6 percentile points, but it still represented 29 percent of the black-white test-score gap in reading (see Figure 2). These results clearly indicate that the unobserved aspects of teacher quality cannot explain the sizable achievement gains associated with students' being assigned to teachers who share their race.

Looking at the data in this way also allows us to see what happens when students are assigned to a teacher of the same race for more than one year. Are the effects cumulative? The results suggest that they are. On average, students' performance improved by roughly 2 to 3 percentile points during their first year with a teacher of the same race. During the second year, no further improvements were observed in the data. But among students who spent three or four years with a teacher who shared their race, test scores increased by 2 to 3 percentile points with each additional year. The cumulative effect of being assigned to an own-race teacher for four consecutive years is roughly 9 percentile points in math and 8 points in reading (see Figure 3). However, it is important to note that, as one would expect, 96 percent of the students who had a teacher of the same race for four consecutive years were white. It is unclear whether similar patterns would emerge for black students who experienced black teachers for multiple consecutive years.

The Impact of Learning from a Teacher of the Same Race (Figure 2)

When taught by a teacher who shares their race, African-American and white students experienced, in one year, increases in test scores equal to about one-third of the test-score gap in the Tennessee data.



* Results significant at the .1 level. *** Results significant at the .01 level.
Note: Test-score gap in Project STAR sample.

SOURCE: Author

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Conclusion

These results clearly support the conventional assumption that recruiting minority teachers can generate important achievement gains among minority students. However, they also suggest that a typically overlooked cost of such efforts may be a meaningful reduction in the achievement of nonminority students. Several important caveats also deserve mention. For instance, students and teachers in Tennessee may experience unique cultural and racial dynamics that make it difficult to extrapolate the findings to other areas of the country. In addition, this study does not say much about racial interactions in the upper grades or about the effects of teachers' race on long-term outcomes such as attainment of further education or employment.

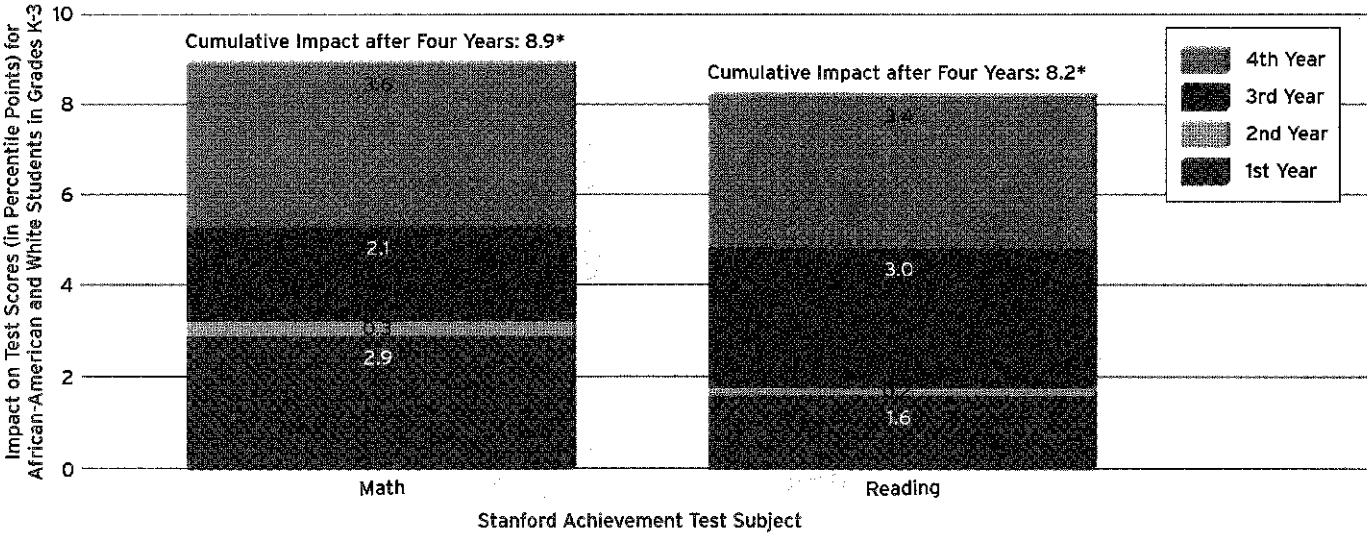
But the most important caveat is that this study tells us little about why the racial match between students and teachers seems to matter. Noting this is especially important since the results could be construed narrowly as supporting increased racial segregation of teachers and students as a means of improving overall achievement. Not only is this interpretation blind to the potentially adverse social consequences of such a policy, but it also ignores the possibility of more balanced policies informed by an improved understanding of why the racial interactions between students and teachers influence student outcomes. Learning why, for instance, white teachers are not as effective with black students as black teachers appear to be might suggest improvements in training that could make teachers equally effective for all students, regardless of race.

The results could be construed as supporting increased racial segregation of teachers and students as a means of improving overall achievement. But this interpretation is blind to the potentially adverse social consequences of such a policy

–Thomas S. Dee is an assistant professor of economics at Swarthmore College and a faculty research fellow of the National Bureau of Economic Research. This article is adapted from a study that will appear in The Review of Economics and Statistics.

Cumulative Impact of Sharing a Teacher's Race (Figure 3)

The benefits of being taught by a teacher of the same race appear to be cumulative over time. Note, however, that 96 percent of the students who shared their teachers' race for four straight years were white.



* Results significant at the .01 level. Additional gains in the second year are not statistically significant.

SOURCE: Author

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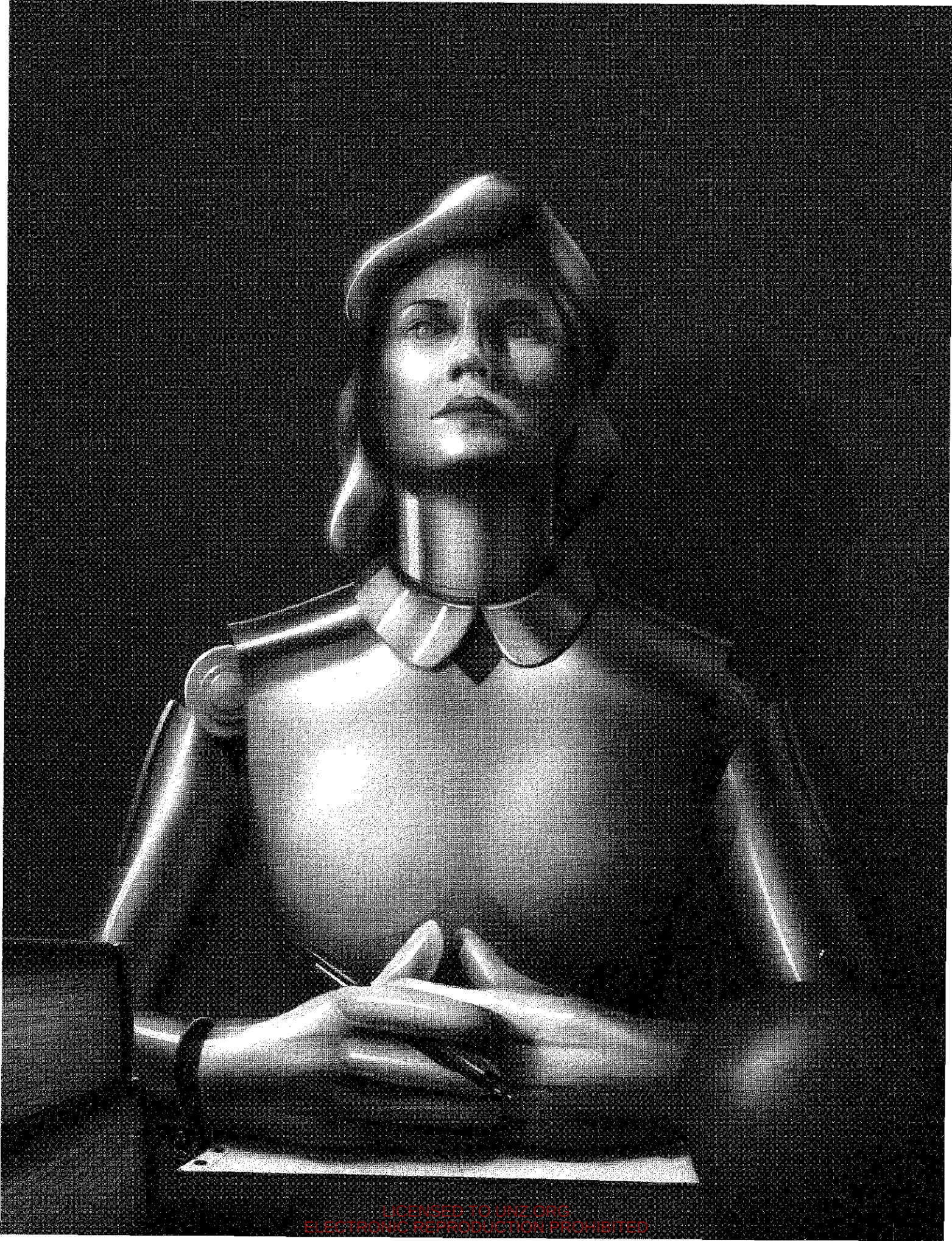

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The Gentleman's A

New evidence that tough-grading teachers elicit better student performance

by DAVID N. FIGLIO & MAURICE E. LUCAS

WITH REPORTS THAT SOME OF THE NATION'S FINEST UNIVERSITIES have been handing out A's like lollipops at Halloween, the lowering of standards in higher education has become a hot topic. But grading standards in primary and secondary education have received remarkably less attention.

There are two major questions related to grading standards. First, to what degree do the grades distributed by schools and teachers correspond to their students' performance on state and national exams? Second, and more important, how does "tough" or "easy" grading affect students' learning?

The literature on these questions is extremely thin. In fact, to our knowledge, the analysis presented here represents the first study to examine the grading standards of individual *teachers* and how those standards affect students' performance on independent exams. Our data set enabled us to examine the test-score gains of individual students from grade to grade across three school years. Thus we can see how individual students perform on nationally normed exams as they move from "tough" to "easy" grading teachers and vice versa. Our results suggest that elementary-school students learn more with "tough" teachers, with the effects varying depending on students' initial performance levels and on the overall performance level of their classrooms.

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Measuring Grading Standards

For this study, we analyzed confidential data provided by the school board of

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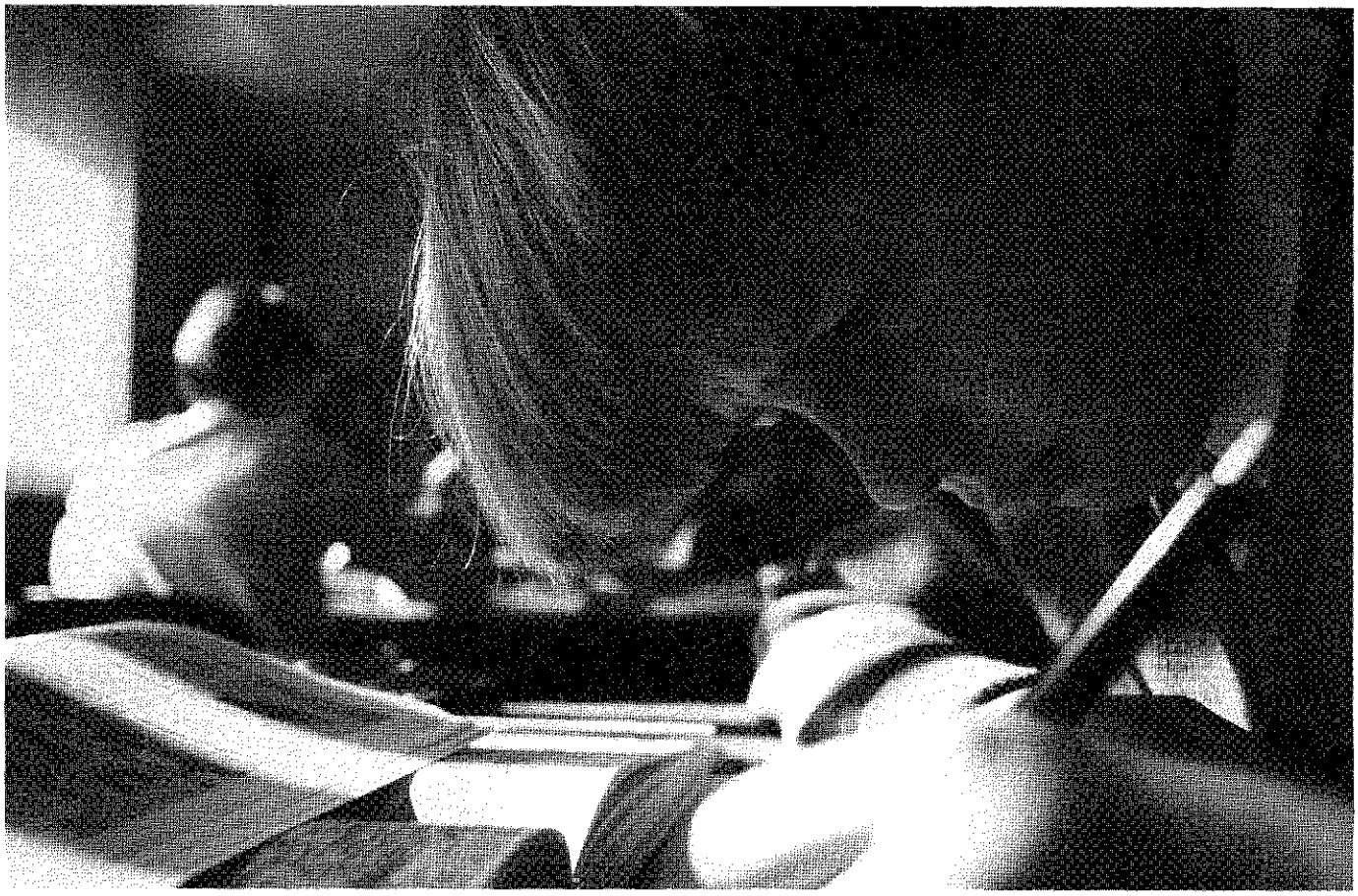

Alachua County, Florida, which includes the city of Gainesville. The data consist of observations on almost every 3rd, 4th, and 5th grader in the school system between the 1995–96 and 1998–99 school years, allowing us to follow two cohorts with three years of data each. Alachua County Public Schools is a relatively large district (by national standards), averaging about 1,800 test-taking students per grade, per year. The county is racially diverse, with a student population that is 60 percent white, 34 percent African-American, 3 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent Asian. Nearly half of all students are eligible for subsidized lunches, while 19 percent are identified as gifted, 8 percent as learning disabled, and less than 1 percent as English learners.

Alachua County provides a unique advantage for a study of this nature because it administers both the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), a nationally normed exam, and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The FCAT was designed to measure the degree to which students are meeting the Sunshine State Standards, which are also supposed to be the basis for students' letter grades. Today, the state uses the FCAT both to rate public schools as part of the "A+" accountability plan and to determine whether students in certain grades are promoted to the next grade. During the period covered by our data, however, these tests were used for informative and diagnostic purposes only (though they were publicly reported each year at the school level).

Students receive scores on the FCAT ranging from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), with the thresholds for each performance level designed to correspond with the letter grades A through F. Thus results from the FCAT are ideal for developing a measure of how generous individual teachers' grading policies are. We can then examine the relationship between teachers' grading standards and their students' performance gains on a different test, the ITBS.

Our primary measure of teachers' grading standards is the average gap between the letter grades given by particular teachers and the FCAT scores attained by their students. Students take the FCAT math exam in 5th grade and the FCAT reading exam in 4th grade. Consequently, this measure of grading standards is calculated using the math grades and test scores of 5th-grade teachers, and the reading grades and test scores of 4th-grade teachers. Examining students' performance on the ITBS in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades enables us to see how their gains in reading from 3rd to 4th grade, and in math from 4th to 5th grade, were affected by their teachers' grading standards that academic year.

Grade Inflation

It turns out that the grades teachers assign are highly correlated with students' ITBS and FCAT scores. But teachers also tend to grade far less stringently than the state standards indicate they should (see Figure 1). For instance, just 9 percent of students who were awarded A's by their teachers

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Just 9 percent of students who were awarded A's by their teachers attained a score of 5 on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.

attained a score of 5 on the FCAT. In fact, just 50 percent attained even a 4. Only 11 percent of students awarded B's by their teachers attained level 4 or above, and a mere 39 percent attained level 3 or above. And of students awarded C's, only 14 percent attained level 3 or above, and only 39 percent attained level 2 or above. Put differently, 86 percent of "C students" failed to achieve the minimum level of competency accepted (Level 3) on the Florida standards, along with 61 percent of "B students" and 17 percent of "A students." Yet not all teachers are so lax: Among the top half of teachers as ranked by their grading standards, 65 percent of A students attained level 4 or above while just 5 percent attained level 2 or below.

In short, teachers vary considerably in their grading standards, even within a single school district. In fact, teachers' grading standards often vary as much within a single school as within the school district as a whole. For instance, during the 1997–98 school year, the district-wide standard deviation in teacher-level grading standards was 0.68, while the mean within-school standard deviation in grading standards was 0.60. Tough-grading teachers, it appears, often teach alongside teachers with far lower standards. For research purposes, this is reassuring, since our empirical strategy relies mainly on within-school variation in teachers' grading standards to isolate the effects of those standards.

A Stable Trait

Estimating the effect of individual teachers' grading standards on their students' achievement gains assumes that these standards remain relatively consistent over time, that they are not unduly influenced by the composition of their class, and that they are not a reflection of some other observable characteristic that might account for any effects we observe. Fortunately, our data provide evidence in support of each of these assumptions.

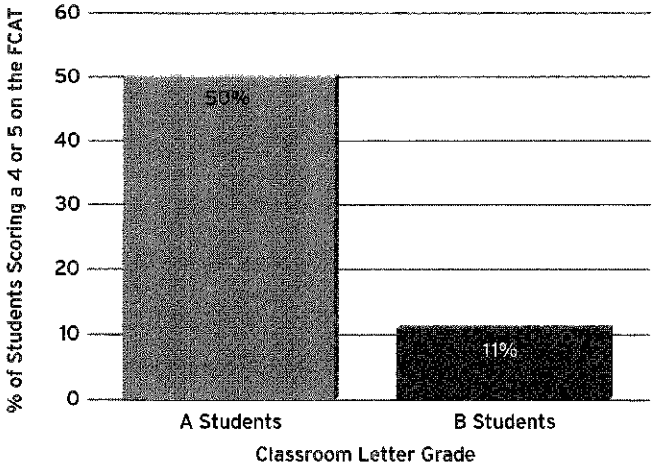
To see whether teachers' grading standards remained stable over time, we divided the full sample of teachers into thirds according to their grading standards each year and examined how the position of individual teachers changed from year to year. For instance, we found that 75 percent of the teachers whose standards put them in the "easy" category (on a scale from "easy" to "moderate" to "tough") in one year remained in that category the following year, while just 6 percent evolved from easy to tough graders in a single year. This trend was essentially the same across the three categories, with very little movement between groups.

Nor does it appear that teachers' grading standards are influenced by the ability level of their students. To gauge this, we compared teachers who taught a higher ability class, as measured by their average 3rd-grade test scores, in 1998–99 than in the previous year, and vice versa. We found that even large changes in the ability level faced by teachers do not seem to affect their grading standards.

Turning finally to the relationship between other observable teacher characteristics and grading standards, we found that relatively tough graders are in fact slightly more experienced and slightly less likely to have attended a selective or highly selective undergraduate institution, though these differences are not statistically significant. However, tough graders are significantly more likely to hold Master's degrees. In any case, our analysis below controls for each of these measures of teachers' qualifications in order to rule out the possibility that teachers' observed characteristics drive the estimated effects of grading standards on student outcomes.

Grade Inflation (Figure 1)

Overall, students who receive high grades tend to attain higher scores than their peers on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). However, just 50 percent of "A students" and 11 percent of "B students" received scores of 4 or higher on the FCAT.



Note: FCAT scores are designed to correspond to letter grades, e.g., 5 = A, 4 = B.

SOURCE: Authors

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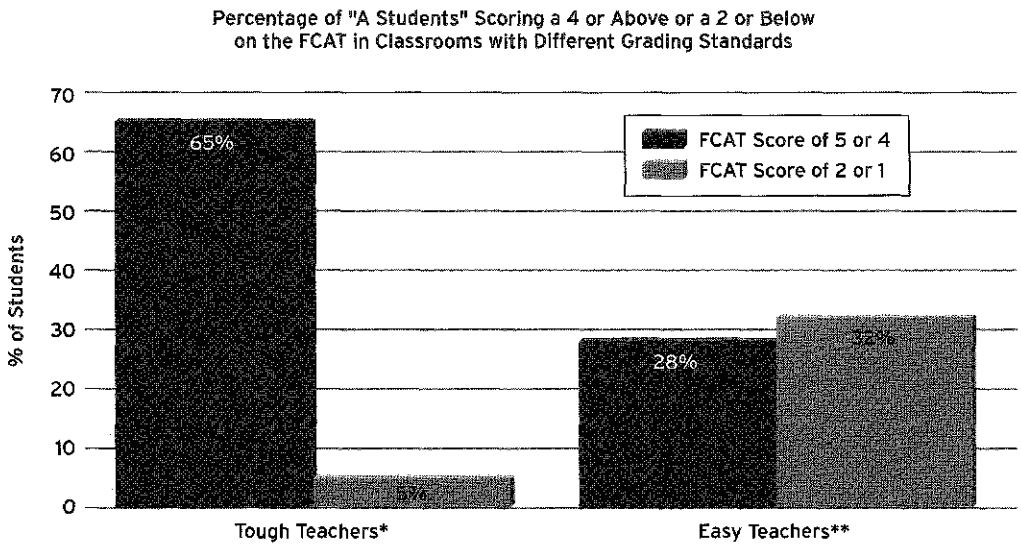
"Tough" versus "Easy" Teachers (Figure 2)

Students who earn an A from a teacher with high grading standards are more than twice as likely to score a 4 or better on the FCAT as are students who receive A's from an easy-grading teacher.



* Teachers whose grading standards are above the median.
** Teachers whose grading standards are below the median.
Note: FCAT scores are designed to correspond to letter grades, e.g., 5 = A, 4 = B.

SOURCE: Authors

Classroom Assignment

The method by which students are assigned to teachers could also cause problems for an analysis of the effect of grading standards on performance gains. The fact that students are not assigned to teachers randomly would be especially troublesome in a cross-sectional analysis, in which one compares one classroom with another in the same year. For instance, looking in cross-section across our own data set reveals that teachers with high standards also have students who are more likely to be white or gifted and less likely to be low-income or learning disabled. This is true even within a given school. Hence it is unclear whether the outcomes associated with high standards are actually due to the standards themselves.

But our analysis looks at year-to-year changes in the grading standards faced by a student, making this less of a concern. We found that students are nearly as likely to move to a teacher with different standards as to experience the same grading standards from year to year. For instance, just 57 percent of students with teachers whose grading standards are below the median within their own school continue to have below-median teachers the next year. Likewise, 54 percent of students with above-median teachers continue to have above-median teachers the next year. This indicates that year-to-year differences in grading standards within schools are close to random. Similar patterns are observed for most subgroups—black and white students are approximately equally likely to move between groups, as are students who are eligible and ineligible for a free lunch. It is the case that gifted students (around 12 percent of the sample), no matter where they start out, are considerably more likely to be placed with a high-standards teacher the next year than are nongifted students. Nevertheless, the vast majority of students are almost as likely to move between low-standards and high-standards teachers as to experience the same level of standards across years. And the results presented below do not change materially when gifted students are excluded from the analysis.

Empirical Results

For our primary analysis, we controlled for the average annual gain made by all students in the relevant school during the period of analysis; for such classroom characteristics as the share of white students, the share eligible for free lunches, and the students' average math score in 3rd grade; and for the teacher's years of experience, education level, and the selectivity of his or her undergraduate institution. In the end, we were interested in the effects on ITBS scores of changing a student from one level of grading standards to another.

Using this strategy, we found statistically significant improvements in test scores associated with higher standards. An increase in measured grading standards of 1 standard deviation is associated with about one-fifth of a year of schooling's worth of gains in test scores—a large effect relative to many other interventions. (A year of test-score gain is measured as the average gain from one year to the next in Alachua County Public Schools. Because Alachua County's gain scores tend to be larger than the national average, these are more conservative estimates of years of gain than are those

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based on national grade equivalents.)

While the average effects of grading standards are important, the theoretical literature on grading standards suggests that higher standards could produce both winners and losers. Students who achieve a given standard may be made better off because the standard becomes a more meaningful accomplishment. But those students who are not able to achieve the standard precisely because it is now more rigorous are made worse off.

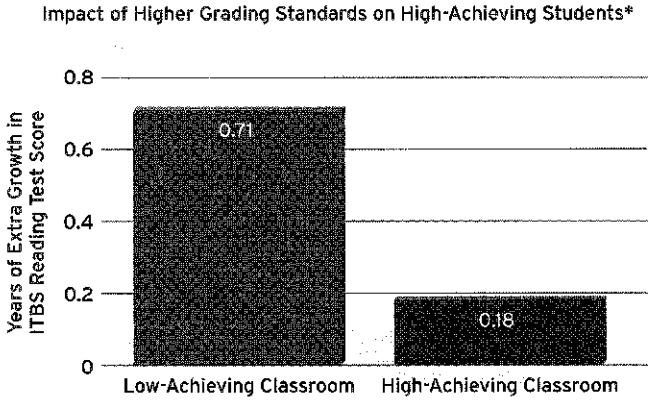
To study this issue, we tested whether the effect of high grading standards varied for students with different initial test scores in 3rd grade. We found that the positive effects of higher grading standards were restricted to those students who were no more than 0.8 and 0.9 standard deviation below the average score in reading and math, respectively. For students performing below this threshold, grading standards had no detectable effect, either positive or negative, on performance. We also found that higher-achieving *classes*, as measured by their average 3rd-grade test score in the relevant subject, may fare somewhat better than lower-achieving classes under teachers with tough grading standards.

Equally interesting, however, are the distributional effects of tough grading standards on performance gains within a given classroom. Put differently, are the benefits of high standards uniform within a class, or do some children benefit more than others? We found that high-achieving students benefit most from tough grading standards when they are placed in classrooms where the overall level of achievement is relatively low (see Figure 3). The opposite is also true: tough grading standards elicit the most improvement from low-achieving students when they are in classrooms with relatively high overall achievement.

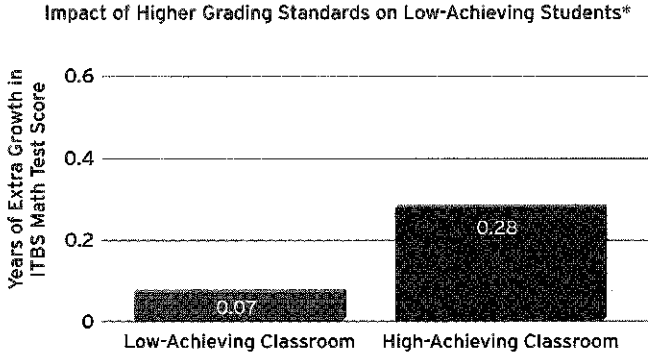
This result has intuitive appeal. Since the grades assigned vary much less across classrooms than does students' performance on standardized tests, high-achieving students should be more likely to earn high grades in classrooms where the other students, on average, do not perform well on external assessments. Likewise, low-achieving students in classes with many strong students run a greater risk of receiving a low grade than they do when in low-achieving classes. So it seems only sensible that initially high-achieving students benefit most from tough teachers when they are among the strongest members of a class. Similarly, initially low-achieving students are challenged more to get a good grade with tough teachers, but particularly when they are among the weakest members of a class.

Benefits from Higher Grading Standards Vary (Figure 3)

For high-achieving students, the positive effects of tough grading standards are larger when they are taught alongside relatively low-achieving peers. The opposite is true for low-achieving students.



* Student scoring half a standard deviation above the mean on ITBS reading test in the 3rd grade. Results significant at the .01 level.



* Students scoring half a standard deviation below the mean on ITBS math test in the 3rd grade. Results significant at the .1 level.

Note: Graphs present the estimated impact of increasing teachers' grading standards by one standard deviation. The average test scores of classrooms labeled "low achieving" were 1.5 standard deviations below the mean for all classrooms. The average test scores in high-achieving classrooms were 1.5 standard deviations above the mean.

SOURCE: Authors

Parental Involvement

What might explain the positive effects of higher grading standards? One possibility, of course, is that high standards motivate students to work harder. A second possibility is that parents may devote more attention to their children's schoolwork if their grades suggest that they are struggling, as they might with a tough-grading teacher.

To assess the latter possibility, in the spring of 2001 we conducted a survey of parents with students in both 4th and 5th grades in Alachua County. We asked the responsible parent to report on how much time he or she spends weekly

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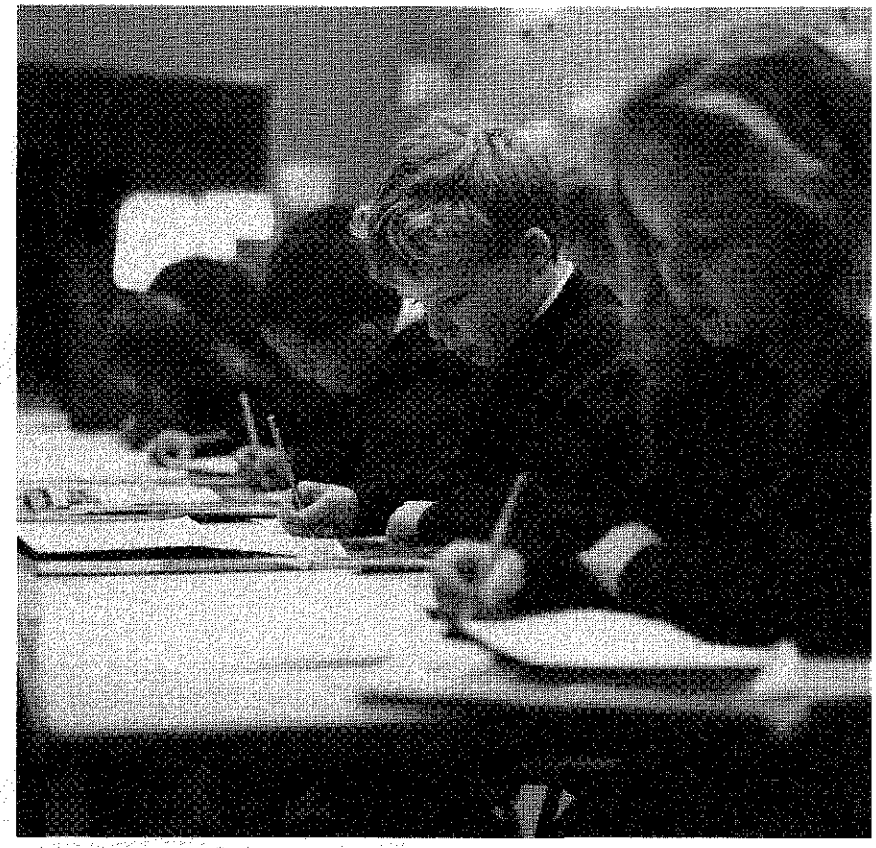

What might explain the positive effects of higher grading standards? One possibility is that parents may devote more attention to their children's schoolwork if their grades suggest that they are struggling.

helping each of the two children with their homework. This allowed us to control for factors, such as parental motivation, that might be common to both siblings in a household. We found that, holding constant the child's grade level, 3rd-grade test scores, and the average 3rd-grade test score in the child's class, parents spend more time helping the child with the tougher teacher with homework than they do helping the sibling with the easier teacher. These results do not appear to be due to tougher teachers' assigning more homework; parental reports suggest that the typical tough teacher assigns just 10 percent more homework than the typical easy teacher.

Tough grading standards elicit the most improvement from low-achieving students when they are in classrooms with relatively high overall achievement.

Another intriguing finding from this survey is that parents do not perceive tougher teachers to be better teachers. We asked parents to grade their children's teachers from A to F. While there is relatively little variation in these grades (in their own form of grade inflation, two-thirds of the parents gave their children's teachers A's), the results suggest that, if anything, parents view tough teachers *less* favorably than they view easier teachers. Parents were 50 percent more likely to assign a grade of B or below to a tough teacher than to a relatively easy teacher, after adjusting for the same controls as above. This result suggests that our measure of grading standards is not merely reflecting some other attribute of a teacher that is viewed as desirable to parents. It also bolsters our argument that it is high grading standards rather than some unobserved measure of teacher quality that is responsible for the positive effects on students' performance gains.

Conclusion

Our results indicate that students benefit academically from higher grading standards. However, these results were not uniform: high-ability students appear to benefit more than low-ability students from high grading standards. Moreover, initially low-performing students appear to benefit more from high grading standards when they are placed in high-achieving classrooms. Likewise, high-performing students appear to react best to high grading standards when placed in low-achieving classrooms.

It is, however, premature to conclude that high grading standards are unambiguously desirable. We cannot yet speak to the consequences of teacher-level grading standards at the secondary level, where the same effects might not hold and where high grading standards might even lead more students to drop out of school altogether. In addition, our results do not tell us anything about how to raise the grading standards of teachers whose standards are currently low. Before we can recommend a general policy of higher standards, we must understand the distributional consequences at all levels and know how to implement a policy of high standards. As the yawning gaps between the grades teachers presently give out and their students' scores on state tests suggest, it will be no easy task to change teachers' grading habits.

–David N. Figlio is a professor of economics at the University of Florida and a research associate of the National Bureau of Economic Research. Maurice E. Lucas is director of research and assessment for the school board of Alachua County, Florida.

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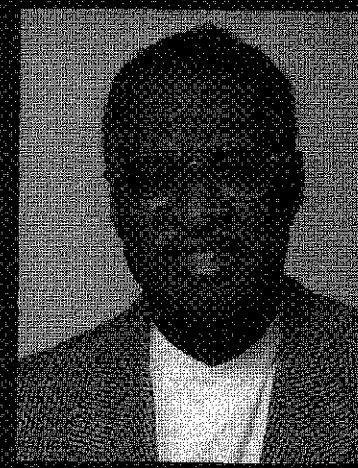

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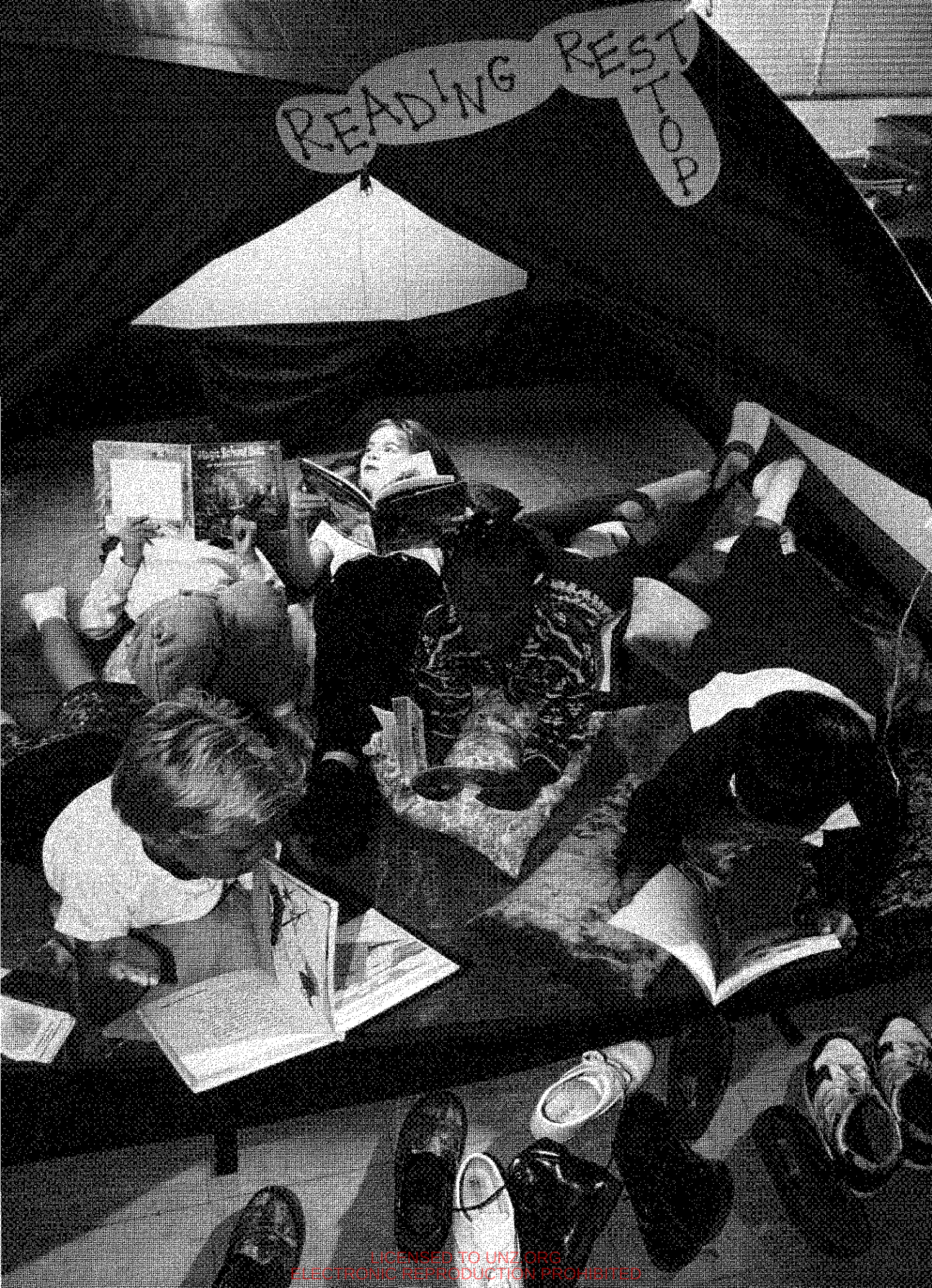

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THE OPEN CLASSROOM

Schools without walls became all the rage during the early 1970s. Were they just another fad?

by LARRY CUBAN

LIKE AUTOMOTIVE MODELS, WOMEN'S hemlines, and children's toys, pedagogical fads come and go, causing an immediate stir but rarely influencing teaching practice in any significant way. The notion that every innovation dreamed up by reformers inside and outside public schools makes its way into the nation's classrooms is popular among those hunting for reasons to malign the schools. But it is crucial to distinguish between mere intellectual chatter and ideas that provoke substantive change.

Where on this spectrum does the idea of the "open classroom" lie? At first glance, it would seem to be just another fad. It burst onto the American education scene in the late 1960s, only to fade away by the late 1970s. Appearances, however, can be deceiving.

British Invasion

The open-classroom movement originated in British public elementary schools after World War II. The movement, known then as informal education, spread slowly to the United States. In 1967 a parliamentary commission headed by Lady Bridget Plowden published a report, *Children and Their Primary Schools*, that promoted open education in all British schools. American educators who visited British schools during the late 1960s had read the Plowden report and visited classrooms where informal education dominated teaching and learning. They viewed informal education—or, as they came to call it, open classrooms or open education—as an answer to both the American education system's critics and the problems of U.S. society.

For more than a decade, U.S. schools had been subjected to withering attacks, blamed for everything from the launch of Sputnik to urban decay. They were faulted for not developing enough engineers and scientists; for being racially segregated and hostile to disadvantaged children; and for producing uncreative graduates who seldom questioned authority. Critics thought that the schools could be the vehicle for winning the Cold War, furthering the civil rights struggle, and roiling a 1950s culture of conformity that suffocated imagination.

Open classrooms' focus on students' "learning by doing" resonated with those who believed that America's formal, teacher-led classrooms were crushing students' creativity. In that sense the open-classroom

PHOTOGRAPH BY CORBIS

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THESE ENDURING pedagogical quarrels are proxies for

movement mirrored the social, political, and cultural changes of the 1960s and early 1970s. The era saw the rise of a youth-oriented counterculture and various political and social movements—the civil-rights movement, antiwar protests, feminist and environmental activism—that questioned traditional seats of authority, including the way classrooms and schools were organized and students were taught.

In both Britain and the United States, open classrooms contained no whole-class lessons, no standardized tests, and no detailed curriculum. The best of the open classrooms had planned settings where children came in contact with things, books, and one another at "interest centers" and learned at their own pace with the help of the teacher. Teachers structured the classroom and activities for individual students and small work groups. They helped students negotiate each of the reading, math, science, art, and other interest centers on the principle that children learn best when they are interested and see the importance of what they are doing.

Consider the scene from a 3rd-grade open classroom in a New York City elementary school described by two proponents, Walter and Miriam Schneir, in a 1971 *New York Times Magazine* article:

> What is most striking is that there are no desks for pupils or teachers. Instead, the room is arranged as a workshop.
>
> Carelessly draped over the seat, arm, and back of a big old easy chair are three children, each reading to himself. Several other children nearby sprawl comfortably on a covered mattress on the floor, rehearsing a song they have written and copied into a song folio. One grouping of tables is a science area with . . . magnets, mirrors, a prism, magnifying glasses, a microscope. . . . Several other tables placed together and surrounded by chairs hold a great variety of math materials such as "geo blocks," combination locks, and Cuisenaire rods, rulers, and graph paper. . . . The teacher sits down at a small round table for a few minutes with two boys, and they work together on vocabulary with word cards. . . . Children move in and out of the classroom constantly.

Schools without Walls

As the idea of open education gained momentum, thousands of elementary-school classrooms became home-like settings where young children moved from one attractive learning center for math to another for art. Additional learning centers engaged them in science, reading, and writing lessons. Teams of teachers worked with multiage groups of students and created elementary schools where children were no longer assigned to grade levels. Some school districts started alternative open education programs at the high-school level and gave teachers discretion to create new academic courses where students directed their own learning, worked in the community, and pursued intellectual interests. At both the elementary and secondary levels, open education meant teachers were acting more as coaches in helping students than as bosses directing children in every activity.

Avid promoters of open education commissioned architects to build schools without walls. Teams of teachers worked collaboratively with one another, using movable dividers to reconfigure the open space for large- and small-group projects and individual study.

By the early 1970s, the phrase open classrooms dominated educators' vocabularies. Even though parents and practitioners found it hard to pin down exactly what open education meant, many school boards adopted open-education programs, and open-space schools were built across the country. Few superintendents or principals could risk saying aloud that they had neither heard of the innovation nor found it desirable without risking sneers from peers or criticism from bosses.

So many schools were adopting the physical attributes of open classrooms that some advocates wondered whether the spirit of informal education was truly being followed. In his 1973 book *The Open Classroom Reader*, Charles Silberman warned enthusiastic teachers and parents:

> By itself, dividing a classroom into interest areas does not constitute open education; creating large open spaces does not constitute open education; individualizing instruction does not constitute open education. . . . For the open classroom . . . is not a model or set of techniques, it is an approach to teaching and learning. The artifacts of the open classroom—interest areas, concrete materials, wall displays—are not ends in themselves but rather means to other ends. . . . In addition, open classrooms are organized to encourage:
>
> - Active learning rather than passive learning;
> - Learning and expression in a variety of media, rather than just pencil and paper and the spoken word;
> - Self-directed, student-initiated learning more than teacher-directed learning.

Backlash

Just a few years later, however, the ground shifted. In the mid-1970s, with the economy stagnating and the nation deeply divided over the Vietnam War, critics again trained their sights

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deeper political divisions between conservatives and liberals.

on the public schools. The national crisis gave rise to a perception, amplified by the media, that academic standards had slipped, that the desegregation movement had failed, and that urban schools were becoming violent places. This time the call was not for open education but for a return to the basics, again mirroring general social trends—namely, the conservative backlash against the cultural and political changes of the 1960s and early 1970s.

Traditional schools sprang up in suburbs and cities. Open-space schools rebuilt their walls. States tried to raise academic standards by developing minimum competency tests that high-school students had to pass in order to receive a diploma. Citations in the media and academic journals indicate that interest in open classrooms peaked somewhere around 1974. By the early 1980s, open classrooms had already become a footnote in doctoral dissertations.

But were open classrooms just another fad? Perhaps in the sense that, like hula hoops and pet rocks, they had soared onto the scene and then disappeared without a trace. Considering them merely a fad, however, would miss the deeper meaning of open classrooms as yet another skirmish in the ideological wars that have split educators and the public since the first tax-supported schools opened their doors in the early 1800s.

The School Wars

For at least two centuries, competing traditions of teaching reading, math, citizenship, and morality have fired policy debates and occasionally touched classroom practices. In teacher-centered instruction, knowledge is often (but not always) "presented" to a learner (via lectures, textbooks, and testing) who is—and the metaphors vary—a "blank slate" or a "vessel to fill." In student-centered instruction, by contrast, knowledge is often (but not always) "discovered" by the learner (via individual and small-group work, projects blending different subjects and skills, and inquiry and questioning), who may be described as "rich clay in the hands of an artist" or "a flourishing garden in need of a masterful cultivator." On the whole, different forms of teacher-centered instruction have dominated U.S. classrooms for the past century.

However, major challenges to teacher-centered instruction were mounted at the beginning of the 20th century by "pedagogical progressives," to use Lawrence Cremin's apt phrase; in the 1960s by enthusiasts for open education; and again in the late 1980s and early 1990s by neoprogressives committed to integrated curricula, performance-based assessments (rather than standardized tests), and smaller schools. Nevertheless, a wide gap remained between ideas and actual practice. Among educators, mainstream classroom practices remained teacher-centered, even if substantial numbers of teachers—trained by progressive faculty members—grasped pieces of the student-centered tradition and created hybrid practices.

The present moment in American education, with its emphasis on standards-based curricula and test-based accountability, surely favors the teacher-centered crowd. Nevertheless, many teachers, particularly in elementary schools, continue to prize active student involvement, cross-disciplinary projects completed by small groups, and similar activities. And even full-fledged open education is still thriving in schools across the country, from the Los Angeles Open Charter School to the Irwin Avenue Open Elementary in North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district. Many teachers and principals still embrace the principles of open education, but keep their heads low to avoid incoming fire.

In high schools, most teachers continue to use teacher-centered practices, leavened slightly by informal practices that have crept into their repertoires. Yet activists in the small-schools movement carry the torch of open education and progressive practices from earlier generations.

Why this long-running ideological war over the best ways to teach reading, math, civic engagement, and character building? The short answer is that these enduring pedagogical quarrels are proxies for deeper political divisions between conservatives and liberals on issues ranging from environmental protection to foreign policy. There are, of course, liberals who believe in traditional education and conservatives who embrace progressive ideas, but the lines are fairly well drawn.

So while the open classroom has clearly disappeared from the vocabulary of educators, another variation of open education is likely to reappear in the years ahead. Deep-seated progressive and traditional beliefs about rearing children, classroom teaching and learning, and the values and knowledge that should be instilled in the next generation will continue to reappear because schools historically have been battlegrounds for solving national problems and working out differences in values.

Since children differ in their motivations, interests, and backgrounds, and learn at different speeds in different subjects, there will never be a victory for either traditional or progressive teaching and learning. The fact is that no single best way for teachers to teach and for children to learn can fit all situations. Both traditional and progressive ways of teaching and learning need to be part of a school's approach to children. Smart teachers and principals have carefully constructed hybrid classrooms and schools that reflect the diversities of children. Alas, that lesson remains to be learned by the policymakers, educators, and parents of each generation.

–Larry Cuban is a professor emeritus of education at Stanford University.

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TENTH ANNUAL EMERSON PRIZES
TO BE AWARDED IN NEW YORK CITY

Sudbury, Massachusetts—The tenth annual Ralph Waldo Emerson Prizes for student work of outstanding academic promise in history at the secondary level will be awarded this Spring to Jacob S. Goldberg, a Senior at the Horace Mann School in New York, Kimberly Salome Greenberg of Great Neck North High School in New York (now at Wesleyan), Jennifer Hsiao of Hall High School in Hartford, Connecticut, (now at Princeton), Michael Korzinstone of Upper Canada College in Toronto, Canada (now at the Wharton School), and Jan Michal Zapendowski of St. Mark's School of Dallas, Texas (now at Brown), according to Will Fitzhugh, Editor and Publisher of *The Concord Review*.

The awards will be hosted by the History Department of The Horace Mann School in the Bronx, New York, in the evening on Saturday, April 17, 2004.

Each Emerson Prize laureate will receive a check for $3,000, and a copy of David McCullough's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography *Truman*, along with the letter of award. Past Emerson awards have gone to 30 high school students, from Czechoslovakia, Colorado, Florida, California, Louisiana, Tennessee, Vermont, New Zealand, Maryland, Utah, Massachusetts, Russia, Washington State, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Illinois, Japan, and New York.

Founded in 1987, *The Concord Review*, the first and only quarterly journal in the world for the academic work of secondary students, has published 56 issues with 616 essays (average 5,000 words) by students of history in forty-two states and thirty-three other countries. These exemplary essays have been distributed to subscribers throughout the United States and in thirty-two other countries.

David McCullough wrote: "I very much like and support what you're doing with *The Concord Review*. It's original, important, and *greatly needed*, now more than ever, with the problem of historic illiteracy growing steadily worse among the high school generation nearly everywhere in the country." **Diane Ravitch**, Senior Research Scholar at New York University and former Assistant Secretary of Education has said: "*The Concord Review* provides a splendid forum for the best student work in history. It deserves the support of everyone in the country who cares about improving the study of history in the schools." **Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.**, Historian, has said: "*The Concord Review* offers young people a unique incentive to think and write carefully and well...*The Concord Review* inspires and honors historical literacy. It should be in every high school in the land."

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by PAUL E. PETERSON & WILLIAM G. HOWELL

Voucher Research Controversy

New looks at the New York City evaluation

"Principal Stratification Approach to Broken Randomized Experiments: A Case Study of School Choice Vouchers in New York City," "Comment," and "Rejoinder"

By John Barnard, Constantine E. Frangakis, Jennifer L. Hill, and Donald B. Rubin; "Comment" by Alan Krueger and Pei Zhu

Journal of the American Statistical Association, June 2003.

Another Look at the New York City School Voucher Experiment

By Alan Krueger and Pei Zhu

Presented at the National Press Club, April 2003.

In *The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools* (Brookings, 2002), we and our colleagues reported that attending a private school had no discernible impact, positive or negative, on the test scores of non-African-American students participating in school voucher programs in Washington, D.C., New York City, and Dayton, Ohio. But after one, two, and three years in New York City, and after two years in Washington and Dayton, significantly positive impacts for African-Americans were observed.

Our results came from randomized field trials, which are generally thought to be the gold standard for research on human subjects. In such studies, subjects are randomly assigned to treatment and control groups by means of a lottery. In the best of worlds, researchers are able to collect information on the subjects' characteristics before the lottery begins, enabling them to confirm that the lottery, in fact, worked as intended. If the treatment and control groups are similar at the beginning of the study, any differences between the two groups that emerge over time can be attributed to the programmatic intervention—in the case at hand, using a voucher to switch from a public to a private school. The results reported in this article are thus to be understood as the difference in test scores between those students who used vouchers to attend a private school and those of their public school peers who would have used a voucher had they been offered one.

Despite the strength of our evaluation's design, the findings have not been without controversy. Specifically, two secondary analyses of the New York City data have recently been published, with widely diverging results. One study, conducted by a group of distinguished statisticians, John Barnard, Constantine Frangakis, Jennifer Hill, and Donald Rubin (hereinafter referred to as Barnard), has confirmed our first-year results but has been virtually ignored in the public media. The other, by Princeton economists Alan Krueger and Pei Zhu, has contradicted our results and twice received favorable coverage in the *New York Times*, where Krueger is an occasional columnist.

From the standpoint of pure inno-

ILLUSTRATION BY TIMOTHY COOKE

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vation and analytical rigor, Barnard has produced the more impressive piece. As befitting an article published in the nation's leading statistics journal, it introduces new statistical techniques to deal with problems that often emerge in randomized field trials: 1) missing data (for instance, not all students who initially joined the study participated in the follow-up testing sessions), and 2) noncompliance (some students, for example, refused the vouchers that were offered to them).

It remains to be seen whether the statisticians' proposed innovation becomes more widely used. At its current stage of technical development, it permits the examination of effects only after one year. Also, in using the technique, Barnard opted to restrict their analysis to those families with only one child participating in the voucher program.

Despite differences in statistical approach and in the selection of students to be included in the analysis, Barnard's findings are largely consistent with those we reported. While we estimated that, after one year, African-American students scored 7 percentile points higher on the math portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills than their peers in public schools, Barnard reports impacts of 6 percentile points for African-American students from low-performing public schools. (Almost all the African-American students came from schools with average test scores below the district mean; the few that did not had almost identical average impacts, but the number of available observations was too small to recover precise estimates.)

By contrast, Krueger and Zhu concluded, "The provision of vouchers in New York City probably had no more than a trivial effect on the average test performance of participating black students." This conclusion rests primarily on three methodological decisions that distinguish their research from both our study and that of Barnard:

Our results came from randomized field trials, which are generally thought to be the gold standard for research on human subjects.

- We and Barnard let the mother's ethnicity define the student's ethnicity, while Krueger and Zhu defined a student as African-American if either parent was African-American.

- We and Barnard considered the results for only those students in grades 1–4, almost all of whom took achievement tests before the lottery. This provided us with what are known as "baseline test scores" that can be used to obtain more precise estimates of program effects. By contrast, Krueger and Zhu also included a large number of kindergartners for whom no baseline test scores were available.

- We and Barnard always adjusted the data to account for students' baseline test scores in estimating our results. Krueger and Zhu, in their preferred results, as presented in their "Comment" on Barnard, exclude these baseline test scores.

All three of these alterations to the research strategy must be made in order to obtain results that differ substantially from those that we and Barnard obtained. Using any one or two of these different strategies does not generate appreciably different results.

How to Define African-American

Let's consider Krueger and Zhu's decision to classify students as African-American if either parent was African-American. Krueger and Zhu regard this decision as a key reason why they obtained results different from ours.

To understand the issue, bear in mind that because many of the students were very young, their ethnic backgrounds were ascertained from information provided in questionnaires filled out by the adults who accompanied them to the testing sessions. These adults were asked to report the ethnicity of the student's mother and, separately, the student's father. They could assign parents to one of nine categories, five of which are: Black/African-American (non-Hispanic); White (non-Hispanic); Puerto Rican; Dominican; and Other Hispanic. Classifying a child's ethnicity is usually straightforward, because both parents are of the same background. In cases where parents were not of the same ethnicity, we classified the child by the mother's ethnicity, simply because most children lived with their mothers, 74 percent of whom were single parents. Sixty-seven percent of the students lived with only their mother, compared with just 2 percent who lived with only their father. Mothers accompanied 84 percent of children to testing sessions; in 94 percent of the cases, the accompanying adult claimed to be a caretaker of the child.

Given the fact that these children tended to live with their mothers (and, often, not with their fathers), the decision to link the child's ethnicity to the mother's appears perfectly sensible. Alternatively, one might classify students as African-American only if both parents are African-American or if the child's primary parental caretaker (usually the mother, but on a few occasions the father) is African-American.

Eschewing these alternatives, Krueger and Zhu used a unique clas-

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sification scheme. They identify students of mixed heritage as African-American as long as either the mother or the father is African-American. If the mother was white but the father was African-American, the child was defined as "black, non-Hispanic." Even if a child had a Hispanic mother and an African-American father, Krueger and Zhu still classified the child as "black, non-Hispanic." Unless one departs from the standard practice of using mutually exclusive categories, students could not be classified as Hispanic or white if either parent was African-American. Krueger and Zhu defend this classification scheme on the grounds that it is "symmetrical." But symmetry is hardly the word for a scheme that classifies Hispanics, whites, and African-Americans according to different principles.

Nevertheless, not much turns on how one defines a child's ethnicity. Regardless of one's definition, impacts after three years that range between 7 and 8 percentile points are observed for African-Americans in New York City (see Figure 1). If one classifies a student's ethnicity by the mother's (the approach we prefer), the effects are 8 percentile points; if one uses either the mother or the father (the approach favored by Krueger and Zhu) the effects are 7 percentile points, a result that is not significantly different from the one originally reported. By itself, altering the definition of a child's ethnicity provides no basis whatsoever for concluding that effects disappear.

It is problematic to include students in a study if you don't know what their achievement level was at the beginning.

Students without Baseline Test Scores

Figure 1 presents results for students with baseline test-score information—the first bar reporting impacts for the definition of African-American originally used, the latter three bars for alternative definitions. The figure's results are based on analyses that exclude from the study all kindergartners, none of whom were tested at baseline. Also excluded are the 10 percent of the students in grades 1–4 who were sick, who refused to take the test, or whose tests were lost in the administrative process.

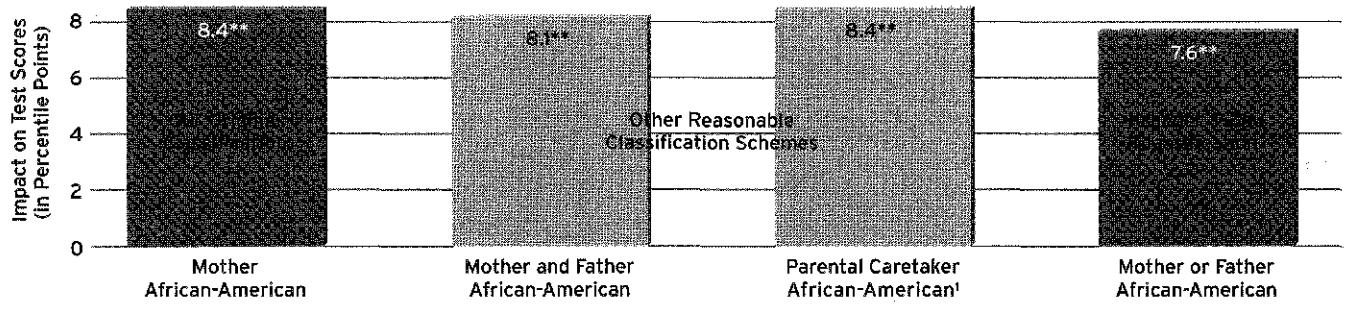
Krueger and Zhu object to the exclusion of any students from the study, claiming that this constitutes the "most important" deficiency of our analysis, as well as that of Barnard. But even when all students are included in the analysis, African-American students who attended private schools scored significantly higher than their public school peers (see Figure 2).

Nonetheless, it is problematic to include students in a study if you don't know what their achievement level was at the beginning. How well students perform on a test at, say, age seven, is tightly connected to how well

Four Approaches, Same Result (Figure 1)

Whether one defines a student's ethnicity by his mother's (as we originally proposed) or by either the mother's or father's (as Krueger and Zhu have proposed), findings remain much the same. Two other ways of defining students' ethnicity also yield similar results.

Estimated Impact of Three Years of Private School Attendance on African-American Test Scores under Four Classification Schemes for Ethnicity



Note: Estimates are for students in grades 1-4 with baseline test scores.
[1] Mother assumed to be the primary caretaker of the child's education except in those cases where the child lives only with the father.
** Results significant at the .05 level.

SOURCE: Authors

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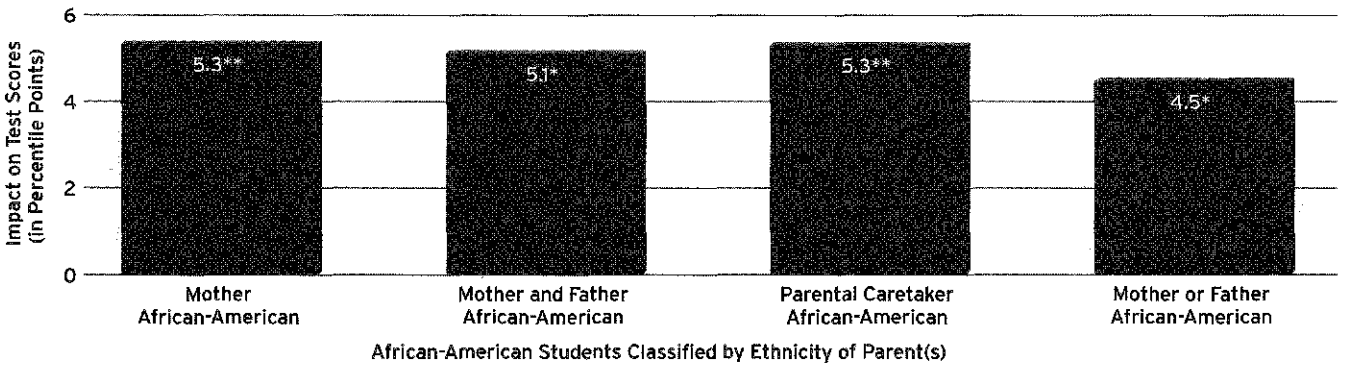
Four More Approaches, Results Remain Significant (Figure 2)

When one includes kindergarten and other students without baseline scores (as Krueger and Zhu propose), private school effects attenuate somewhat but remain statistically and substantively significant.

Estimated Impact of Three Years of Private School Attendance on African-American Test Scores under Four Classification Schemes for Ethnicity



Note: Estimates are for students in grades K-4 with and without baseline scores, controlling for baseline test scores whenever possible.
* Results significant at the .10 level.
** Results significant at the .05 level.

SOURCE: Authors

they will do at age eight, nine, or ten. In fact, the correlations between baseline and follow-up test scores in New York consistently hover around 0.7. By comparison, the correlations between mother's level of education and follow-up scores were only about 0.1.

Restricting the study to those students for whom baseline test scores are available affords a check on whether the lottery worked as intended and whether any problems arose downstream. For these students, all looks fine on both accounts.

When including all students, even those lacking baseline test scores, one can only hope that the two groups are similar with respect to this critical characteristic. Nonetheless, Krueger and Zhu defend their inclusion on the grounds that "because assignment to treatment status was random . . . a simple comparison of means between treatments and controls without conditioning on baseline scores provides an unbiased estimate of the average treatment effect." This claim, says Barnard, "is simply false."

If not quite false, the claim is at least dubious, because there were many ways for the treatment and control groups to become unbalanced. For example, about a third of the students did not remain in the study into the third year—a fairly standard rate of attrition from this kind of research protocol, but one that raises concerns that the treatment and control groups might have lost students with different baseline test scores. For this reason, we limited our analysis to those students for whom baseline scores were available, and hence for whom we were able to verify that the treatment and control groups did not become unbalanced.

Neither changing the definition of African-American nor adding students for whom baseline test scores are missing appreciably changes the results we originally reported.

But perhaps something else is to be gained from including all students, regardless of whether baseline information was available. Krueger and Zhu suggest that by adding these cases one can generalize findings to another grade level (kindergartners). Unfortunately, this is a hazardous generalization, given the fact that the results for kindergartners were significantly different from those for the older students. African-American students in grades 1–4 scored significantly higher if they attended private school, a result observed in all three years of the study. The results for kindergartners, meanwhile, were considerably more erratic; the effect of attending a private school for three years was a negative 13.9 percentile points. In the absence of base-

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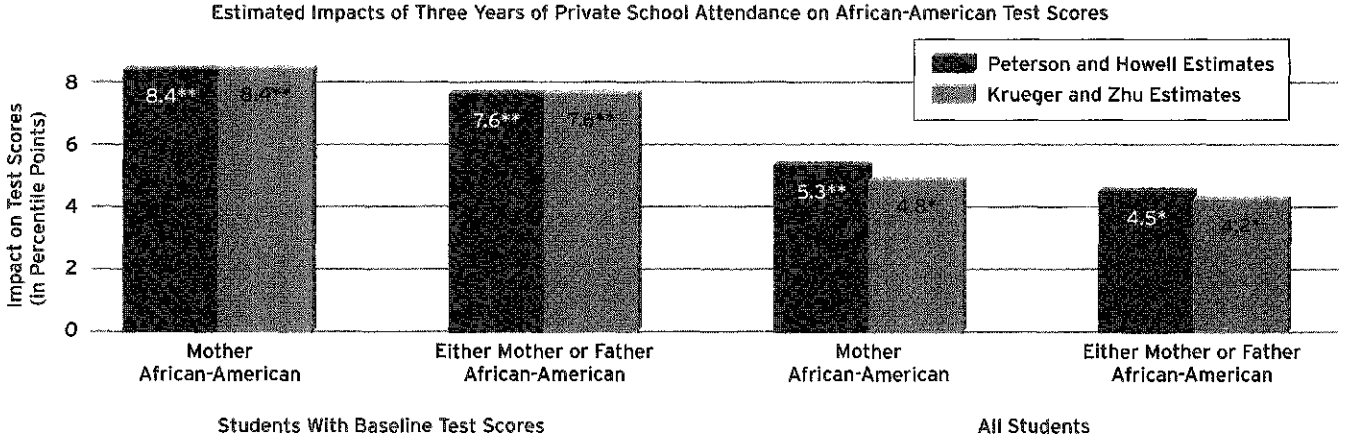
Reconfirmed Results (Figure 3)

Krueger and Zhu's claim that they could not duplicate our results is misleading; the findings in their replication hardly differ from ours.



Note: Students with and without baseline scores, controlling for baseline test scores whenever possible.
* Results significant at the .10 level
** Results significant at the .05 level

SOURCE: Authors; Krueger and Zhu correspondence

line scores, we don't know whether the findings for kindergartners are genuine or simply the result of errors in the administrative process.

Krueger and Zhu also note that their inclusion of all students in the sample generates more precise estimates. But gains in precision obtained by increasing the number of students observed will be offset by losses associated with failing to control for baseline test scores. One can assess the extent to which these competing forces balance each other by comparing the estimates' standard errors: the smaller the errors, the more precise the estimate. As it turns out, the standard errors are larger, not smaller, when estimating statistical models that include all students but do not control for baseline test scores.

A compromise strategy, suggested by Krueger and Zhu, includes all students and adjusts for baseline test scores whenever possible. This analytic approach generates more precise estimates, the results from which are presented in Figure 2. But since these analyses also introduce risks of bias (principally by including the kindergartners for whom no baseline scores were available), the results in Figure 2 are inferior to the results provided in Figure 1. Nonetheless, they still reveal significantly positive effects of attending private schools on African-American test scores. In other words, even if one includes kindergartners in the study, as Krueger and Zhu recommend, the essentials of our original finding remain intact.

More than 25 years ago, James Coleman and his colleagues found that attending private schools was more beneficial for black students than for whites.

Krueger and Zhu have not accepted these findings, however. Instead, they have said that they cannot obtain equivalent results when they attempt to conduct an analysis identical to ours. But this claim is misleading. In fact, Krueger and Zhu's results, available by correspondence, hardly differ from ours. As the first set of columns in Figure 3 shows, among students with baseline test scores, we both find that the estimated year three private school impact is 8.4 percentile points for all African-Americans (as defined by the mother's ethnicity, our preferred definition). And, as shown in the second set of columns in Figure 3, we both find an impact of 7.6 percentile points for African-Americans when using Krueger and Zhu's preferred definition of African-American (students whose mother or father is African-American). Moreover, when students without baseline scores are added to the analysis, they obtain results that are, once again, virtually indistinguishable from ours (see the last two sets of columns in Figure 3).

In other words, Krueger and Zhu

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also now report consistently positive results for African-Americans, regardless of how ethnicity is defined, even when kindergartners are included in the analysis—as long as baseline scores (and only baseline scores) are taken into account in the statistical estimation of programmatic effects.

To Ignore or Not to Ignore Baseline Test Scores

Neither changing the definition of African-American nor adding students for whom baseline test scores are missing appreciably changes the results we originally reported. To get different results, still a third methodological step is required. Krueger and Zhu argue that, to avoid a biased estimate, one must ignore baseline test scores, even for those students for whom these are available. But if including baseline scores introduced bias, the magnitude of the effect would change substantially. It does not. Adding baseline scores shifts estimated effects by less than half a percentile point.

Not only is no bias introduced, but including baseline test scores has the advantage of yielding more precise results, allowing researchers to reach firmer conclusions about the efficacy of a programmatic intervention. Estimated impacts from models that control for baseline scores are significant at the .05 level (using the two-tail test), while the less-precise results in models that do not control for baseline scores are significant at only the .10 level, using a one-tail test (a significance level below the threshold Krueger and Zhu find acceptable).

In sum, Krueger and Zhu take three methodological steps to generate results that are not statistically significant: 1) changing the definition of the group to be studied, 2) adding students without baseline test scores, and 3) ignoring the available information on baseline test scores, even though this yields less precise results.

The New York data continue to support the conclusion that disadvantaged African-American students benefit from private schooling.

By contrast, Barnard agreed with our decisions to: 1) use the mother's ethnicity as the basis for defining the child's, 2) focus on those students in the grades for which baseline scores were available for most students, and 3) control for baseline scores, whenever possible. Using pioneering statistical techniques, Barnard reports similar findings, while Krueger and Zhu venture far afield to uncover contrary ones.

The Value of Randomization

Given differences of opinion among researchers, it is easy to jump to the conclusion that randomized field trials are not the gold standard they are thought to be. If social scientists can reach opposite conclusions from the same data set, then research, even from randomized field trials, may do little to inform policy debates.

We take a different view. In New York, the results reported by all parties are consistently positive—only the magnitude of the effects and the level of statistical significance fluctuate. Furthermore, different statistical techniques generate roughly equivalent results. Moreover, the results that we report are consistent with past research on public and private schools. More than 25 years ago, James Coleman and his colleagues found that attending a private school was more beneficial for black students than for whites, as measured by test scores. More recently, Princeton economist Cecilia Rouse, after reviewing the research literature, concluded that "the overall impact of private schools is mixed, [but] it does appear that Catholic schools generate higher test scores for African-Americans." Another literature review, conducted by economists Jeffrey Grogger and Derek Neal, found few clear-cut gains for white students, while "urban minorities in Catholic schools fare much better than similar students in public schools."

Controversies surrounding randomized experiments can nonetheless be reduced by collecting baseline data on the outcome variable of greatest interest—in this case, students' test-score performance. In the absence of this information, experiments devolve into endless arguments over whether random assignment actually occurred and whether the two groups being compared are genuinely equivalent. Consider, for example, the recent skepticism directed toward Tennessee's Project STAR study, a randomized field trial on class size that failed to collect baseline test-score data.

Still, whether or not one restricts the analysis to those cases where baseline test scores were available, results are clear. In New York, private-school attendance positively affected the test scores of African-American students, but not those of any other ethnic group. For this reason, we think that the evidence from New York continues to support the conclusion—also reached in a wide variety of earlier studies—that disadvantaged African-American students living in urban environments benefit from private schooling.

–Paul E. Peterson, the editor-in-chief of Education Next, *and William G. Howell are professors at Harvard University. They are the principal authors of* The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools *(Brookings, 2002). To view the unabridged version of this article, log on to www.educationnext.org.*

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Teachers Unions

The good, the bad, and the ugly

The Worm in the Apple: How the Teacher Unions Are Destroying American Education

by Peter Brimelow

HarperCollins, 2003, $24.95; 320 pages.

As reviewed by George Mitchell

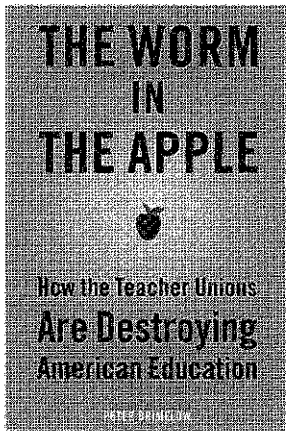
Peter Brimelow aims high. In *The Worm in the Apple*, he seeks to emulate *The History of Standard Oil*, the legendary effort by Ida Tarbell that helped to usher in the antitrust movement a century ago.

While Tarbell's villain was Standard Oil, Brimelow's culprits are the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). However, though many of his concerns are valid and well documented, Brimelow is unlikely to earn a spot on bookshelves next to Tarbell. Unlike the self-effacing Tarbell, Brimelow overreaches with his rhetoric, distracting from and often obscuring his message.

For example, Brimelow considers teacher union leaders "commissars of [an] American Red Army." The NEA "has chosen to metastasize into the National Extortion Association." It exhibits a "persistent streak of left-wing loonyism." Brimelow cites the words of "Chairman Mao Tse-Tung" to demonstrate that K–12 schools reflect "the most prominent outbreak of socialism on the American scene."

Framed this way, Brimelow will at best reinforce the sentiments of those readers who already accept his basic premise. At the same time, he will be largely discounted by those whose support is required for real change to occur.

Brimelow is at his best in describing the broader historical context in which the teacher unions operate. He demonstrates how collective bargaining for teachers has produced labor agreements that stifle innovation and risk taking. He makes it clear that the dramatic rise in influence enjoyed by the teacher unions has coincided with stagnant and unacceptable levels of student performance.



Effective unions are not inherently at odds with the creation of high-quality products.

Brimelow laments that little of this is understood by mainstream America. He correctly singles out the news media, where reports of the teacher unions' activity and influence are woefully inadequate. He is on the money in claiming that "the teacher/school board conclave," lacking such independent scrutiny, "effectively excludes other interested parties, such as parents and taxpayers."

But what to do? Brimelow's principal remedies involve a menu of anti-union legislation: repeal collective-bargaining laws for teachers; eliminate teacher tenure; enact "right to work" laws; and so on.

Brimelow lets these suggestions crowd out his other proposals—proposals that might be both more feasible and more effective. For example, rather than questioning the right of teacher unions to exist, Brimelow could have shown how effective unions are not inherently at odds with the creation of high-quality products. The auto industry, a leading example, illustrates how a market driven by real consumer choice, but with a heavily unionized work force, can function well. Instead, Brimelow's concluding chapter seems to instruct readers to support school choice not so much because doing so might improve the schools, but because it will annoy teacher unions.

In the context of my own study of Milwaukee's teacher union (with Howard Fuller and Mike Hartmann), Brimelow's dire description of the national scene rings true. All the more disappointing, then, that his book reads more like Ann Coulter than Ida Tarbell.

–George Mitchell is a public policy consultant in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

As reviewed by Julia E. Koppich

Will *The Worm in the Apple* someday become the answer to a question on the Advanced Placement exam in U.S. history? The author, financial journalist Peter Brimelow, hopes so. Brimelow considers himself a muckraker, the term coined by Theodore Roosevelt to describe writers who highlighted

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corruption in government. In a 1906 speech, Roosevelt branded some of the muckrakers' methods sensationalist and irresponsible—an apt description for Brimelow's book.

Brimelow uses the plural to refer to teacher unions, calling them collectively the "Teacher Trust." But he focuses on the National Education Association (NEA) and especially on that organization's California affiliate—for which, conveniently for him, reform is often anathema. To be sure, Brimelow makes some valid criticisms of unions—the bargaining of sometimes too-rigid employment contracts; some unions' "just say 'no'" attitude toward reform; proposals for more authority without accompanying responsibility for results. But he also could have found counterexamples. He just didn't look very hard.

Teachers embraced unionism for a simple reason: they wanted to be involved in shaping the conditions of their employment. In a recent survey by Public Agenda, more than 80 percent of teachers said that without unions, they would be vulnerable to the vagaries of school politics, and their salaries and working conditions would be much worse.

Brimelow suggests repealing collective-bargaining laws so that "school boards would no longer be forced to deal with the union just because a majority of the teachers voting in a certification election supported it." He is half right. Collective-bargaining laws do need to be revamped, but not as an exercise in limiting democracy.

Brimelow accuses unions of "opposing every reform idea that comes down the pipeline." What he means is that unions oppose those reform ideas that he favors. I was heartened when he referred to the reform efforts of the teacher unions in Montgomery County, Maryland and Denver, but dismayed by his flip dismissal of them.

Montgomery County's school district and union are focusing on standards-based professional development and the evaluation of teachers by principals, with the goal of improving student achievement. The joint work of the Denver Public Schools and Denver Classroom Teachers Association has resulted in a proposed compensation system, to be voted on by teachers in March 2004, that includes differentiated pay. However, these facts don't fit the story Brimelow wants to tell, so the facts are given short shrift.

Likewise, many of the ideas we regard today as education reform's conventional wisdom—linked standards and assessments, consequences for poor performance, testing new teachers, paying some teachers more than others, and charter schools—were given prominent public voice by a teacher union leader, the late Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers. However, this doesn't square with Brimelow's worldview, so he ignores it.

Many of the ideas we regard today as education reform's conventional wisdom were promoted by the late Albert Shanker.

While harsh on teacher unions, Brimelow makes excuses for journalists whose coverage of the unions is weak or limited: "On those rare occasions when reporters do cover the teacher unions, they find themselves overwhelmed by the arcane and incomprehensible." Are teacher unions really more complicated than energy market manipulation, insider stock trading, or new medical advances, all of which journalists have covered with distinction?

Throughout the book, Brimelow uses a variety of linguistic devices to drive home his points. But his over-the-top language soon grates on the nerves. He refers, for example, to segments of the NEA as "covens of cranks" and to some union staffers as—this is original—goons. If he has a serious message to communicate, his tone diminishes it.

Sometimes Brimelow is just plain mean for the sake of being mean. In describing an NEA convention, he says, "You can't avoid feeling that you've stumbled into a sort of indoor rally for human hot-air balloons." At first the reader might think that Brimelow is making a semi-humorous reference to the tone of the floor debate. No—he's referring to the delegates' physiognomy: "An alarming proportion of attendees wobble and waddle with thighs like tree trunks."

At best, Brimelow can be accused of false advertising. His argument is not that teacher unions are destroying American education, but that they labor long and hard to preserve the status quo. If true, this too is an unpardonable sin. But this book contains so little about education—virtually nothing about classrooms, schools, or districts—even that point gets lost.

In fact, Brimelow uses teacher unions as the device to reach his real agenda: "The problem with America's government school system [Brimelow's name for public schools] is socialism. The solution is ... the introduction of a free market." Taking on teacher unions may get readers' blood boiling—union-bashing has become sport in some circles—but Brimelow's real objective is to write an anti–public school polemic.

–Julia E. Koppich is president of J. Koppich & Associates, a San Francisco–based education consulting firm.

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Uncivil War

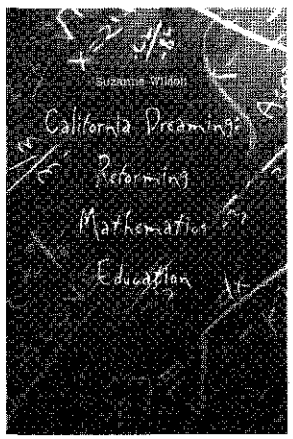
A bloodless account of a bitter battle

California Dreaming: Reforming Mathematics Education

by Suzanne M. Wilson

Yale University Press, 2003, $29.95; 320 pages.

Reviewed by Ralph A. Raimi



California's "math wars," the struggle over what is sometimes called the "new New Math," illustrate all the ills and disagreements that have plagued American education for the past century. They have been but a chapter in the efforts by "progressive" educators to legislate equality of results in the schools via the dumbing down of the curriculum. In place of academic achievement, progressives offer self-esteem and racial harmony as the principal prizes, though there are others, especially for the bloated education establishment itself.

Unfortunately, Suzanne Wilson, a professor of teacher education at Michigan State University, addresses neither the politics nor the mathematics of the debate (if a "math war" can be called a debate) with enough insight to shed light on the broader trends in America's schools. Nor will her book help to instruct the public or teachers of mathematics on the fundamental issues that were at stake in California. Her generous attempt at an even-handed, sympathetic account portrays the math wars as an unnecessary fight that can be ended by a return to civility, as if misunderstanding among decent and disinterested parties were the problem.

California has been unique among the states in having a strong legal structure allowing it to require essentially all its public schools to teach mathematics according to "Standards" periodically published by the State Board of Education. Similar constraints are gradually becoming law in other states, but during the period from 1980 to 2000 California was the only real example. This constraint is applied through state-supplied textbook money for grades K through 8. The details are intricate and the stakes are very high, both for the theorists, who want their view of education to prevail over the whole state, and for the publishers, who must satisfy the state's requirements in order to win entrance to the enormous textbook market.

During the years following the ill-fated "New Math" initiatives of the 1960s, there was no visible national mathematics curriculum; but in 1980 the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) published the manifesto *An Agenda for Action*, followed by a 1989 document generally referred to as "The NCTM Standards." Taken together, these two documents provided firm support for the progressive view of what to call mathematics and how to teach it.

The NCTM's progressivism called for teachers not to teach explicitly, but to elicit students' response to problems, generally "real life" problems. Teachers should be nurturing, not judgmental; no child should be elevated above the others; testing itself is suspect as punishing the losers. Even a too-detailed announcement of required academic content is seen by NCTM, as its own 1989 standards attested, as an implied attack on the deprived and downtrodden.

In 1985 and 1992, California adopted "Frameworks" that embodied the NCTM Standards, thereby establishing progressivism in the state's textbooks and examinations. A few years' experience with these programs generated a vigorous public reaction, mainly from middle-class parents anxious about the intellectual vacuity of the new programs and the implications for the future of their children. As a result, in 1997 a new State Board of Education called a halt to the movement and approved a set of more rigorous state standards, standards that could not be satisfied by the progressivist textbooks that had won the education establishment's endorsement.

The education authorities were not unresponsive. The California superintendent of education and even the National Science Foundation official in charge of financing the new math initiatives of the 1990s launched a campaign mischaracterizing the new California standards as a return to rote memorization and other evils of "traditional" mathematics teaching, as if pedagogical style were the issue. In fact, pedagogy itself was not addressed at all in the new California standards. More to the point, though not mentioned explicitly, was that the new standards would make it impossible for those content-impaired, NCTM-approved math programs to be continued in California.

The State Board of Education's most infuriating ploy in this game of hardball politics was surely the hurried and unexpected commissioning of a last-minute rewrite of an establishment-sponsored standards draft. Even though the revision was written by four distinguished Stanford mathematicians, the educators' propaganda machine persuaded

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much of the mathematics education community that the new state standards were purveying mindless rituals as mathematics, to the destruction of students' "higher order thinking skills."

Those already familiar with the politics surrounding the controversial 1997 adoption of the new California mathematics standards can doubtless tease such details out of Wilson's rather bland account, for she duly notes the various commissions, frameworks, surveys, and reports as they succeeded one other during the stormy period from 1980 to 2000. But it is all set in deliberately neutral terms, implying that this debate is always an honest one, which it is not.

Wilson's account fails to describe the enormous budget of deception, charlatanry, careerism, ill will, and ignorance that underlies so much of the politics in question. Had she been able to find and deliver to her readers the full stories of Janet Nicholas, the key member of the 1997 Board of Education; Williamson Evers, an anti-progressivist political scientist at the Hoover Institution and one of the pioneering voices against the California dreams of the 1990s; and Luther Williams, the head of the National Science Foundation division that was responsible for the sillier math programs of the 1990s, she could have amplified her story immeasurably beyond her diary of their public pronouncements. The unpublicized infighting of such people has had as much practical consequence at the school-room level as all the theoretical apparatus of the schools of education.

Wilson's account fails to describe the enormous budget of deception and ignorance that underlies so much of the politics in question.

All told, *California Dreaming* gave me the feeling of reading a history of the Protestant Reformation that did not mention the genuine death-dealing armies in the fields of central Europe, as if the battalions were engaged in a learned dispute concerning interpretation of the Gospels. For the reader who wishes to understand the fundamentals of today's math wars and the baneful progressivist influence on American schools in general, a history such as Wilson's, though an excellent straightforward chronology, is both too much and too little. As a healthful supplement I should like to recommend an earlier, polemical view of the major problem that confronts us in education: Albert Lynd's *Quackery in the Public Schools*, a neglected 1953 book whose title is not yet out of date.

–Ralph A. Raimi is a professor emeritus of mathematics at the University of Rochester.

Just the Facts

A guide for school researchers

School Figures: The Data Behind the Debate

by Hanna Skandera and Richard Sousa

Hoover Institution, 2003, $15; 342 pp.

Reviewed by Chester E. Finn Jr.

The education field sometimes seems flooded with numbers, but all too often they're numbing, obscure, of uncertain accuracy, and hard to track down. How often have you found yourself fumbling for an apt datum to illustrate a point, or wondering what's the truth about (say) school spending, teacher salaries, or math achievement scores over recent years or decades? You can, of course, rummage around on innumerable websites or try to heft the bulky compilations of the National Center for Education Statistics, but such exercises are often painful and frustrating and sometimes just plain fruitless.

To the rescue come Hoover research fellows Hanna Skandera and Richard Sousa with a wonderfully manageable and well chosen volume of data. It's organized under six big headings—schools, teachers, achievement, expenditures, "school reform" and "students and their families." Better still, under each heading the authors offer a handful of "propositions" that, in their judgment, support the data, such as "Across-the-board teacher salary increases may not stand alone as an education reform solution"; or "Summer school gives clear evidence that accountability is changing the way we educate." Each proposition is followed by a mini-essay, then by a few well selected and nicely presented charts, graphs, tables, and maps that supply the supporting data.

You may well encounter propositions that you yearn to debate. Did you know, for example, that the share of GDP spent on K–12 education has hardly budged since 1970? That teachers' salaries are but 40 percent of school expenditures today (compared with 51 percent in 1961)? That the average elementary school has more than tripled in size in the past 50 years? That school violence is declining? Find these facts and more in *School Figures*, a reference work that all school reformers should keep readily at hand.

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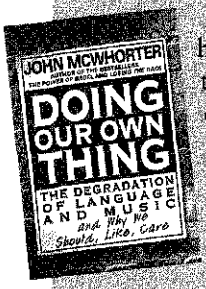
BOOK ALERT

Doing Our Own Thing: The Degradation of Language and Music and Why We Should, Like, Care, by John H. McWhorter (Gotham Books).



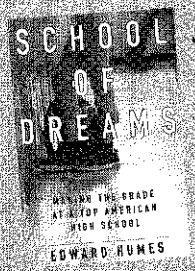
"We must have the attitude that every child in America, regardless of where they're raised or how they're born, can learn," President George W. Bush once observed.

The president talks funny. So do we all. McWhorter has thought through the larger implications of this simple fact: Written speech is nothing like spoken speech. The written word, at its best, is ordered and logical; spoken language, if not prepared in advance, will wander into incoherent, ungrammatical waters.

But America, unlike other nations, is trying to replace written speech with spoken speech, glorifying the latter as less elitist and more in touch with the nation's diversity. The consequences are dreadful, says McWhorter, not only for our language but also for our civil order. As a linguist, McWhorter knows that dictionaries and the rules of grammar neither can nor should imprison a language. But he explains to teachers why students need to be taught how to write properly. It is an unnatural, but rewarding, act.

Judging School Discipline: The Crisis of Moral Authority, by Richard Arum (Harvard Press). Fifteen years ago, Gerald Grant's influential *The World We Created at Hamilton High* illustrated how efforts to expand the rights of students had undermined educators ability to run their schools. Grant ended his account on an optimistic note, suggesting that new compromises had created a satisfactory equilibrium.

In a compelling new account, however, Richard Arum, a New York University sociologist, argues otherwise. Drawing on his analysis of more than 1,200 court cases and decades of data, Arum finds that overreaching by the courts has crippled the moral authority of educators. The mere threat of lawsuits, Arum argues, keeps teachers and administrators from taking the steps necessary to ensure safe and orderly schools. He concludes with several sensible proposals for reducing disorder at the school level and for enhancing the authority of educators.



School of Dreams: Making the Grade at a Top American High School, by Edward Humes (Harcourt). What makes Whitney High School so special? Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist Edward Humes immersed himself in the life of this renowned magnet school in Cerritos, California, to find out. The school is not notable for having extra money or a first-class facility; it is housed in a no-frills building, and its per-pupil spending is the lowest in the district. Nor is it distinguished by the quality of its teaching staff, which Humes describes as "at best uneven."

Visionary leadership clearly plays a role in fostering an expectation that all Whitney graduates will attend college—many of them at elite universities. Strangely, however, Humes places less emphasis on the fact that the school accepts only the district's strongest students, who must maintain a C average or return to their neighborhood schools.

Humes' account is engaging, but beware of journalists peddling policy advice based on the experiences of one highly atypical school and a tendentious reading of the research on test-based accountability.

No Child Left Behind? The Politics and Practices of School Accountability, edited by Paul E. Peterson and Martin R. West (Brookings). The extensive accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have provoked much cheerleading and hand-wringing, but not much reasoned analysis. This edited collection, which pulls together a series of studies first presented at Harvard University, is a welcome contribution to the conversation about NCLB. The studies focus on the national politics of accountability; state, local, and international evidence regarding the effects of high-stakes accountability; and topics such as charter school performance and the consequences of disaggregating data by students' race and ethnicity. The overall thesis is that political pressures are likely to soften the harsher edges of NCLB, but that even temperate accountability is likely to be beneficial.

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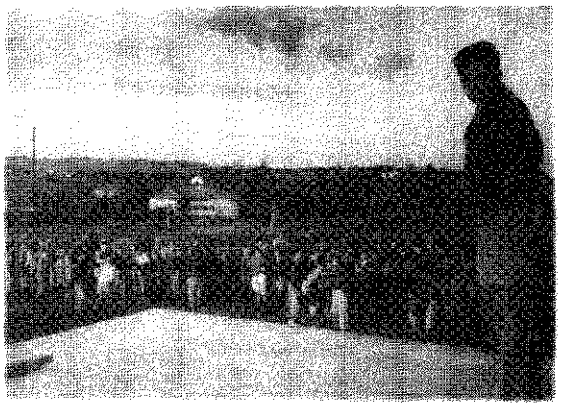
by AMITAI ETZIONI

A Kibbutz Education

The collective farm was a powerful educational tool

"Working the earth purifies the soul" was one of the many mottos at Ben Shemen, the boarding school I attended as a teenager living in what was then British Palestine. The educational experience at Ben Shemen was grounded in the soil; students had to spend two hours each day working on the collective farm.

Ben Shemen's ingenious design called for each child to have close relations with four adults: a homeroom teacher who served as the main educator; a "house mother" who oversaw the dormitories; a youth leader with whom students hung out after school hours; and the farm foreman under whom the children worked each day.



The four adults met regularly to coordinate their guidance of the youngsters toward what Ben Shemen considered the needed direction. Thus, if a child disobeyed one of the foremen, his house mother would learn of it and would draw on the affection the child had for her in helping him to accept the foreman's authority.

The school's unique structure meant that children were members of four different peer groups: their classmates of the same age; their dormmates of various ages (which in my case included an older boy by the name of Shimon Peres); the coeducational members of their youth group; and their fellow workers on the farm. The elder boys were expected to foster communal mores among their juniors.

The whole idea of Zionism was summarized for us as an inverted pyramid: in Europe, Jews were mostly middle-class intellectuals, merchants, and financiers, resting on a narrow base of relatively few Jewish blue-collar workers and even fewer farmers. We Israelis were to set the pyramid upright, by forming a strong base of farmers and workers. *They* relied on others to defend them; *we* would take our fate into our own armed hands.

At Ben Shemen one ritual came on the heels of another. One day we were raising the blue-and-white flag of a nation yet to be born. The next day we were moved by a speech by the local commander of the Hagana, the Jewish underground fighting the British occupation, who led us in taking an oath: "Never again will we go like lambs to the slaughter!" Staff and students frequently staged plays extolling the virtues of working the land and fighting for our homeland.

At Ben Shemen, we raised the blue-and-white flag of a nation yet to be born.

For me, Ben Shemen provided a powerful conversion experience. I entered as a youngster rebelling against my disciplinary mother, the loving weakness of my father, and the religious indoctrination of my school. Two years later, in 1944, I returned to my parents' home, now comfortable with learning, authority figures, and the expectations of my peers. Above all, I departed from Ben Shemen as a young Israeli, with a sense of purpose that was as strong as it was focused: to join those lining up to fight a war of national liberation against the British occupation and to form a just Jewish society, a new Zion.

On my last day, the principal called me to his office. He smiled broadly, first showing me a rather unflattering letter I had brought with me from my previous school. The principal then pointed at my final report card from Ben Shemen. It was dotted with marks of "very good." He added, "You will do us proud." Then he warned me affectionately: "Just so you do not get too cocky, let me tell you that we figure that you will never become a soccer player or star in any other sport." Education never stopped at Ben Shemen.

–Amitai Etzioni is a University Professor at George Washington University. This essay is excerpted from his memoir, My Brother's Keeper: A Memoir and a Message *(Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).*

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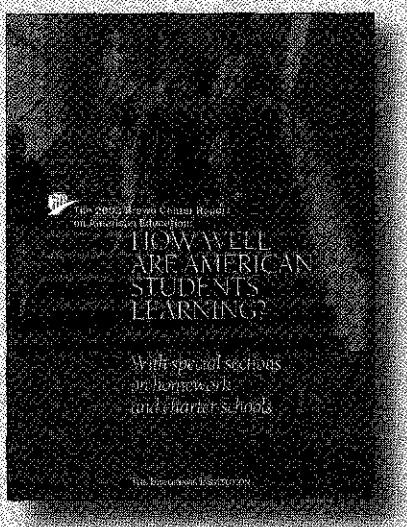

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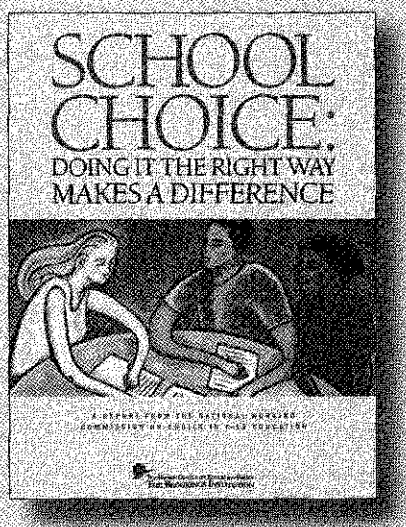

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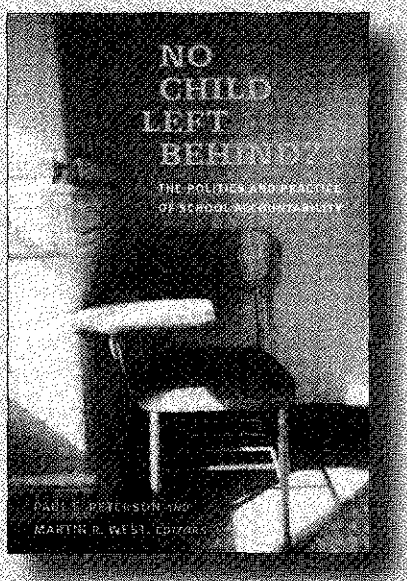

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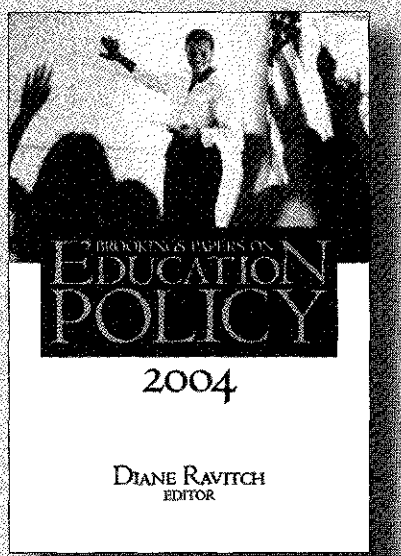

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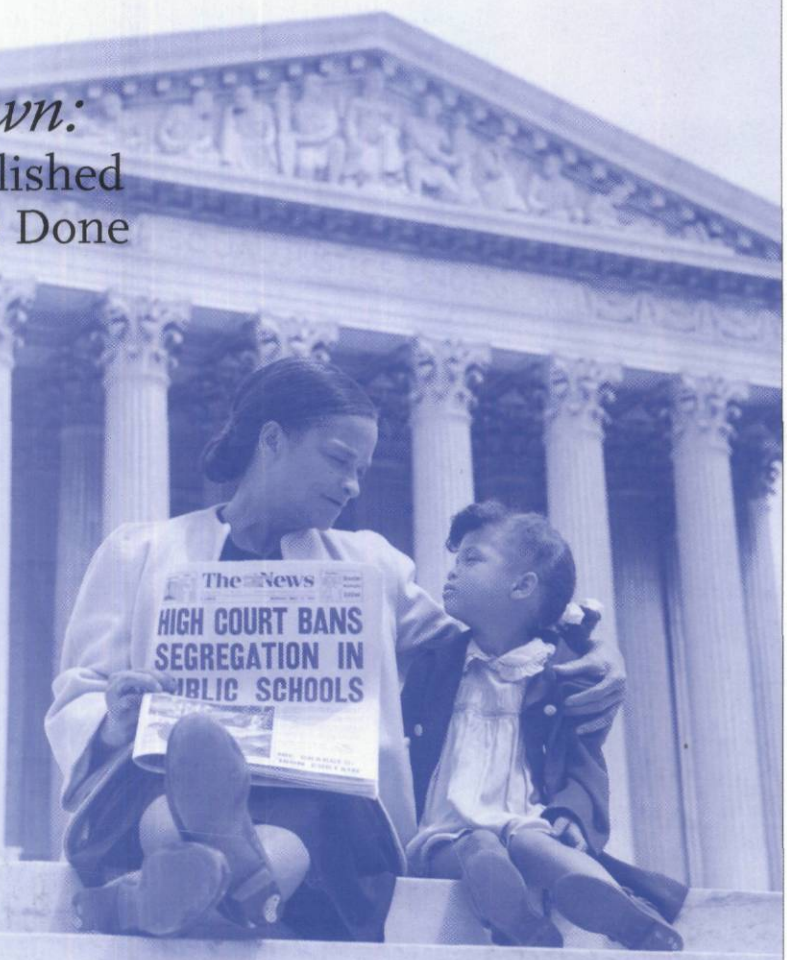

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